



# ANNUAL REPORT

2021

**BrusselsChildbirthTrust**  
Supporting Families and Parents-to-be in Belgium



# CONTENTS

## THE BCT'S MISSION STATEMENT SAYS

*To provide help and support in English to families in and around Brussels during the early years of parenthood and beyond.*

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On the Cover:  
Ana, Martijn, Alexander & Nathalie

# INTRO

This past year has continued to be one in which the BCT learned to adapt. Despite the challenges faced from the ever-changing COVID restrictions, our events and services could still take place either virtually or in-person or even both simultaneously. These were made possible, as always, thanks to the continued creativity and adaptability of volunteers.

Starting the year with the suspension of group activities at the BCT Clubhouse saw us launch a new initiative, the Second Living Room. Members could book a single Family Time slot at our premises to benefit safely from a welcome change of space. Some members chose to meet up socially outside and others could stay connected regularly through online meet-ups or via their group's communication channels.

With social restrictions easing over the summer, we brought in a second initiative, the possibility for members to rent the Clubhouse for private birthday parties. As with Family Time, this ensured that the BCT premises were being used until members felt happy to resume meeting in greater numbers. This they did from September as group activities resumed, until the regrettable closure of the Clubhouse again in December because of stricter COVID regulations.

We are very much looking forward to announcing the return of all our traditional events as well as the creation of exciting new ones. There is a need felt by all to see life return to normal. At the same time, we are sure that the friendships formed and support provided during the challenges of this past year will make the BCT community even stronger.



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This collective strength was evident during our participation in 'la Bruxelloise' charity race in October. The BCT team was impressive not only in its fundraising efforts but also in the positive energy of so many BCT families supporting this worthy cause together in memory of a much-loved volunteer. The event showed why the BCT still exists, thanks to support from our members and the dedication of our volunteers, to whom we express our heartfelt gratitude. We can't wait to see what you are all capable of over the coming years!

Thank you all,



*Louise*

Louise Nugent  
BCT President

# MEMBERSHIP

In 2021 we had 304 new families joining the BCT and 315 members renewed their membership.

This was a much better year than 2020 as we were almost back to the same level as 2019 for New Members and only 10% behind for Renewals.

The trend was confirmed with September and October being the busiest months for both New Members and Renewals, the two cumulative months representing 30% of the total year.

Our popular events (Halloween parties, Crafts for Christmas Funday, Family photo) and Click & Collect Craft Bags (Spring and Christmas) have, again, been a good incentive for lapsed members to renew their memberships in order to take part.

We started 2021 as we left 2020: With heavy restrictions due to the pandemic that forced us once again to discontinue all our Clubhouse activities. In order to ease the negative financial impact of another lockdown, we sent an appeal for donations to our Volunteer Complementary members, which was relayed to the Lifers group, resulting in generous donations through discretionary membership fees paid and crowdfunding via our website. The BCT is grateful for this amazing continuous support!

With the Communication team we looked at cost saving measures and reduced delivery points from 15 to 3 for the Small Talk magazines sent by courier in 2021: by reducing the delivery points in 2021, we saved an estimated €375.

During 2021 we kept improving our membership management processes.

We personalised our Renewal Reminder emails by clearly stating the BCT number as well as the required Membership fee (Standard or Long-Term) in the email, so our members have all information on hand to process their renewals.

We also introduced a PayPal QR-code to use with the PayPal app to further improve the renewal process. This has the added benefit of a reduced charge fee (0.90% + €0.10 per transaction) for the BCT on those transactions.

For PayPal payments not done via their app, we have successfully applied for the Charity transaction rate: we are now paying 1.70% + €0.35 per transaction (instead of the previous rate of 3.40% + €0.35).

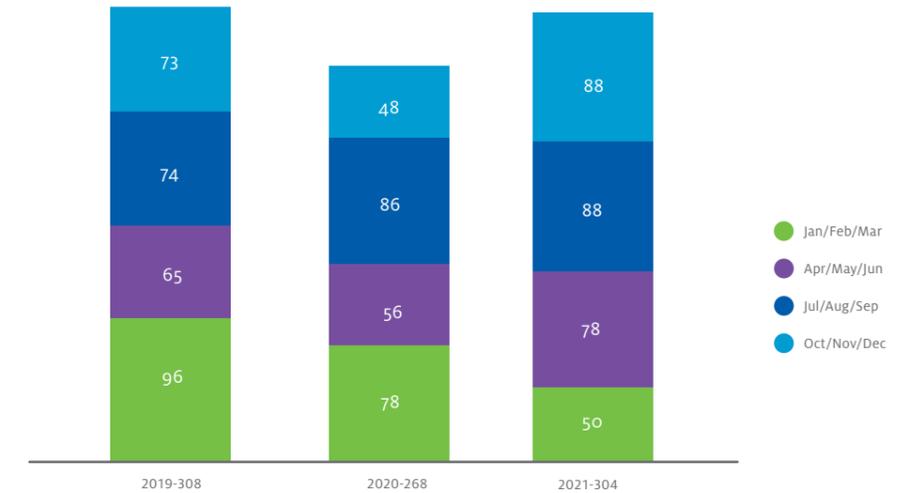
We have been working behind the scenes and we will launch a new membership management system in 2022. This will, not only, make the joining and renewal processes easier, but our members will be able to select their interest groups and register online for playgroups and events, and there will be many other features.

## THE TOP RANKING COMMUNES FOR OUR 635 MEMBERS

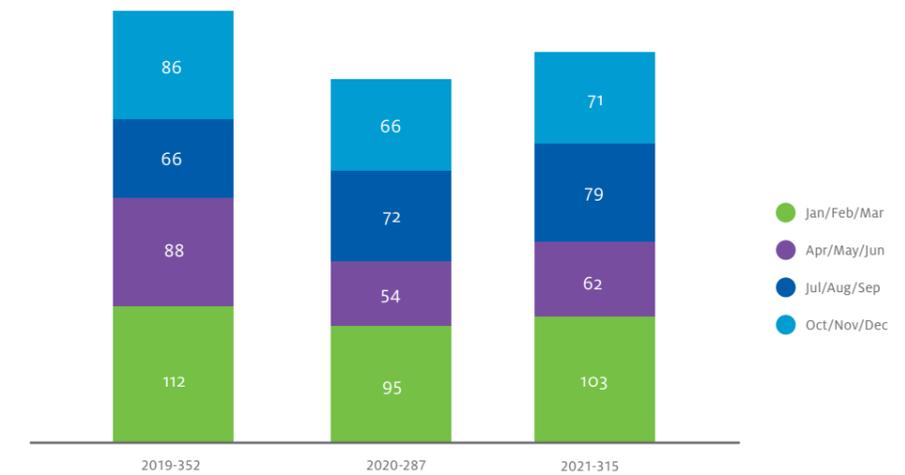
1	Ixelles	107 families
2	Woluwe-St-Lambert	60 families
3	Brussels	58 families

## BCT MEMBERS IN 2021

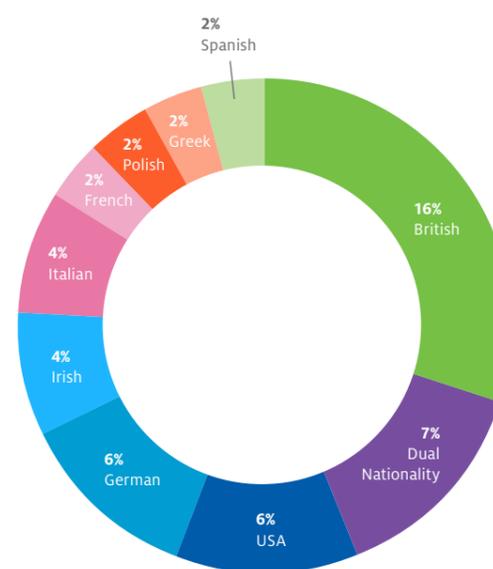
**685** FAMILIES



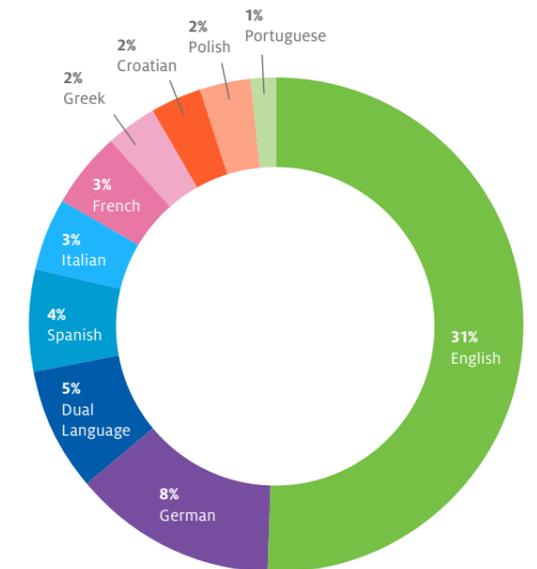
QUARTERLY NEW MEMBERS PER YEAR



QUARTERLY RENEWALS PER YEAR



TOP 10 MEMBER'S NATIONALITIES



TOP 10 MEMBER'S MOTHER TONGUES

# VOLUNTEERING

If **'socially-distanced-teamwork'** was the 'buzz' word for the BCT during 2020 then **'adaptability'** was certainly the word that summed up volunteering for the BCT during 2021.

Every couple of weeks the covid rules changed. So just as we had established playgroups and meetings once again, be it in limited group numbers, we then had to close the Clubhouse completely again and transfer activities online once more. Our volunteers were all very sympathetic to the changing circumstances and were as desperate to meet up as the playgroup members themselves. They **adapted as quickly and as creatively as they could**, hosting stroller walks together in parks, bringing coffee in thermos flasks to drink afterwards, meeting at cafes and restaurants which fell under different opening rules than 'not for profit' a.s.b.l. organisations such as the BCT.



Volunteering at the Halloween Party

We should be extremely proud of the many and varied activities that still took place during 2021. In some areas this **adaptability established totally new BCT events!** Thanks to the adaptability of our long standing BCT Craft Funday committee, these volunteers were able to work together and arrange our first 'click and collect' spring craft bag event. Bringing in much needed funds for the BCT, but most importantly helping to keep members' children occupied with a wonderful selection of spring and easter crafts to make at home, when most activities were still closed.

2021 saw fewer volunteers offering to host Facebook live events, mainly due to the sheer fact that everyone was 'weary' of such activities after nearly 2 years of online quizzes and activities. However, volunteers were more tuned-in to thinking about members wellbeing and staying in contact. Our exercise group volunteers moved as far as possible for online or outside classes. More group leader

volunteers established WhatsApp groups this year, as an important tool for their groups to keep in touch and share information, even when they were not physically meeting up. When things did open during the summer, several groups also decided to hold joint meetings, so helping to share the workload of group leaders and meet member families who shared the same ethos of keeping to a set of BCT established Covid safety rules.

As to be expected, our volunteer turn around has been especially high this year. The pandemic made it very difficult to commit long term to a role especially for those that wanted to organise playgroups. Either the groups had to be suspended following government regulations and when they resumed, the personal situation of volunteers had changed or childcare and schools closed temporarily or family matters in member's home countries got in the way. Covid-19 made life unpredictable for many volunteers.



Volunteering at the Run for Ciara event

As a consequence, and in order to keep our services and activities running, many **BCT board members and longstanding volunteers very kindly stood into vacant volunteer roles on a temporary basis.** This ensured continuity of groups once covid restrictions were lifted and new volunteers could be recruited.

Once again, all the volunteers who made up the BCT Board during 2021 worked tirelessly to develop and constantly review the BCT Covid safety measures. They made sure that BCT measures correlated to those issued by the Belgian government and regional areas but also made sure that they always erred on the side of caution and kept all of our members and volunteers as safe as possible.

At present the **BCT has around 90 volunteers regularly working to keep the BCT up and running.** In the past this number was nearer 200 volunteers, highlighting the fact that more volunteers are taking on more than one role or task. Their adaptability to juggle more and more roles and their dedication to the work of the BCT is highly commendable, however this is a worrying trend; the weight of volunteering lies on the shoulders of fewer and fewer members. During 2021 the WhatsApp and Messenger groups showed that every day our team of volunteers was waking up to hear of another family in quarantine due to covid symptoms, or schools closed and online lessons resuming. **This meant volunteers' working hours were severely affected and changeable by the day.** Again, the adaptability of other volunteers

helped the BCT overcome these hurdles on a near weekly basis and allowed our services and groups to continue to function despite the very difficult circumstances.

2021 saw several key volunteers step down after many years of dedicated service. Mainly due to the fact their children are now older but also due to increasing difficulties of juggling volunteer work, working from home and online school lessons during the pandemic. Thankfully 2021 also saw several new members offering to help with tasks, reassuring as this is, several important key roles which involve a substantial workload still need to be filled.

The continued importance of teamwork cannot be stressed enough. The majority of our members just physically no longer have the time to take on such heavy volunteer workloads **so larger roles need to be shared out between several volunteers.**

*Volunteers, as we all know are the beating heart of the BCT organisation, and without a reliable and dedicated supply we simply cannot continue to exist!*

# The CLUBHOUSE

## THE CLUBHOUSE

The new BCT Clubhouse continues to provide families with a multifunctional and convivial space to meet up. With its sizeable and attractive garden, it was still enjoyed, despite the suspension of group activities from January to June 2021 and again from December 2021, because of the pandemic. When the Clubhouse reopened in September 2021, we hoped to resume a full calendar of face-to-face activities, as had been organised one year before. Although prenatal courses, Pregnancy In Belgium lectures, First Aid and some member courses remained online throughout, for a few months after the summer we were able to reoffer some face-to-face playgroups, interest and local group meetings and member courses.

During the suspension of group activities, members were offered a new initiative, 'Family Time' at the Clubhouse. They were invited to come with their immediate family bubble to enjoy the space as their 'Second Living Room' away from home.

*We were pleased that the Clubhouse and garden could still be used in a safe way during this extended period when government regulations recommended limiting social contacts.*

Time and money were invested in the garden during 2021 for necessary general maintenance, the repair of steps, the purchase of a storage shed and lawnmower. Construction began on a play activity wall and volunteers worked to keep the garden in order. In October, a memorial bench was donated to the garden, dedicated to a much-loved former local group leader,



The Clubhouse



who sadly passed away earlier in the year. The Ciara O'Dwyer bench dedication event was one of very few BCT events to be held in the Clubhouse garden in 2021, because of the ongoing Covid restrictions on social gatherings.

A new initiative for 2021 was the rental of the Clubhouse to members for private parties. During another difficult financial year, this was a very welcome additional source of revenue, when regulations allowed up to 20 people to meet between July and the end of November. Two Open Days were held one weekend in mid-June to invite new members, course instructors, former and potential volunteers to visit the premises.

In a boost to increase membership, the general public passing by was also invited to learn more about the child-friendly activities on offer inside the Clubhouse.

## PLANS FOR 2022

A few improvements are planned for the storage space inside of the Clubhouse. The garden play activity wall will be completed and work will continue to transform the space into a safe and child-friendly space which can be used in all seasons.



The Ciara O'Dwyer bench dedication event

## LIBRARY

The Clubhouse is home to the BCT lending library and on-site children's library. With the prolonged suspension of group activities, fewer members were able to discover the library than we had hoped. The 'Second Living Room' initiative, however, gave members plenty of time to browse through the all the books available.

## PLANS FOR 2022

We are looking for a new volunteer to take over managing the library on site, as well as the book catalogue, which is listed on the BCT website. A list of recommended books sought for the lending library was shared with members in a 2021 issue of Small Talk magazine. We hope to acquire some of these titles by donation or purchase, to further enhance the library collection.

# PRENATAL SUPPORT

2020 was a difficult year for everyone: Little did we know that 2021 would be more of the same.

We taught 12 online classes involving 93 families, and 3 refresher sessions (one less class but just 3 fewer families than 2020). There were a few reunions in the park and we will start holding courses in person in the new year for couples who request them as well as reunions in the Clubhouse in order to introduce new families to this wonderful family friendly space.

Congratulations to Prenatal Teacher Özra on the birth of her second son in March, and thanks to Alison and Nina-Benedicte who stepped in to cover her maternity leave.

The Pregnant & New Mums' drop-in sessions have also moved on-line. Despite that, they've become increasingly popular and now have 118 mums on the related WhatsApp group which is its main means of communication.

During the year, we also started to offer Hypnobirthing courses, a specialised form of prenatal preparation, to small groups. 13 families have participated. These are facilitated by Kate, who had previously given prenatal classes and organises the very popular New Mums group.

## PREGNANCY IN BELGIUM EVENINGS

Özra and Alison continue to present the Pregnancy in Belgium Evenings on Zoom, which works well. They continue to receive excellent feedback from attendees. The information booklet that is given to attendees is now totally updated thanks to the team of teachers and volunteers who researched and designed it. We plan regular reviews in future.

We ran a total of 13 sessions in 2020, with 84 couples attending. There have been some unexpected outcomes of holding classes online. Families can join from distant locations including one couple in the US and one in Brazil.



Enormous thanks to the volunteer booking team for all these classes, for their efforts to find spaces for almost all those who apply and to the Services treasurer who now gives a weekly update on all bookings.

## FIRST AID FOR PARENTS

These classes, facilitated by certified First Aid Instructor, Kate Ellwood, changed somewhat when they moved online due to COVID-19. The popular virtual sessions concentrate on how to apply simple first aid principles with confidence.

During 2021, 152 people attended: 107 members, and 45 non-members who pay a higher fee.



PIB flyer  
Prenatal courses flyer



# POSTNATAL SUPPORT



On behalf of all BCT members, we thank our volunteers who continue to offer their time fulfilling the following postnatal service roles. We continue to receive positive feedback from those who use the services. Despite Covid challenges, we have added a new service and the demand of some postnatal services in 2021 has increased. The volunteers remain enthusiastic and motivated to provide the help that they can during these challenging times.

We continue to observe members seeking information primarily via social media. We welcome the community service that social media has brought but are also seeing that the person-to-person contact is essential to support new parents. This is particularly noticeable for our Early Day Support volunteers.

## TENS AND VALLEY CUSHION RENTALS

TENS rentals have remained relatively stable over the last year. Women continue to look to alternatives for pain management during labour. Most couples renting the machines hear about the machines from the BCT prenatal classes. The Valley Cushions continue to be rented out occasionally.

## EARLY DAYS SUPPORT

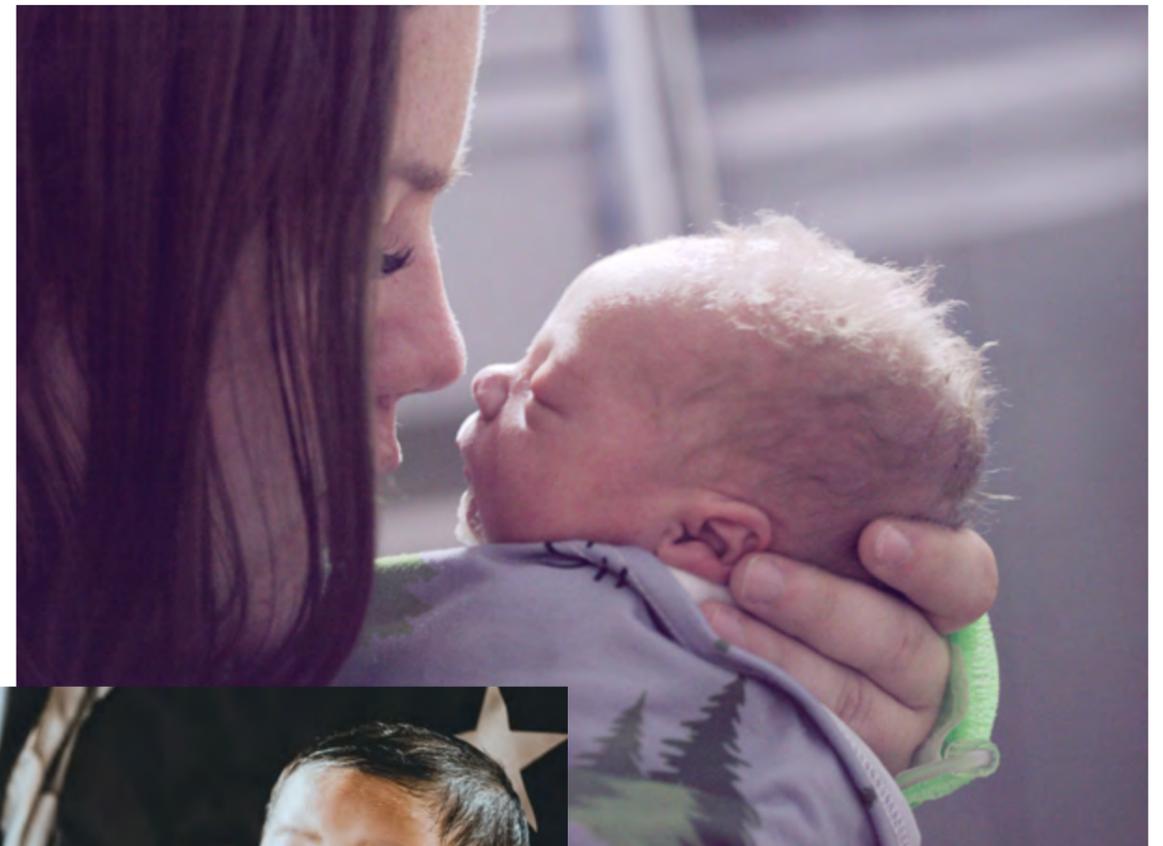
Early Days Support volunteers continue to reach out to new parents and provide a listening ear. The team decreased to three volunteers this year, but the volunteers have managed to support as many new parents as in 2020. The participants of prenatal classes were offered support, as well as other new parents who contacted BCT through other channels. Support continues to vary from a single contact before or after birth to regular contacts. In 2022 we hope to take on more volunteers and build up this important service.

## BREASTFEEDING & BOTTLEFEEDING SUPPORT

There are two active breastfeeding support volunteers. The demand for this service remains stable compared to last year. The volunteers receive questions mostly via email, which they then often follow up by telephone. We have merged our breastfeeding and bottle-feeding support services and our volunteers are now offering support for both services. There is very little demand for the bottle-feeding service as concerns are often addressed via social media groups within the BCT.

## EXPERIENCES REGISTER

The Experiences Register continues to be a valuable service for those who have specific needs and who seek peer support from another member having had a similar experience in a particular subject matter. The activity in this service continues to decrease, but the requests



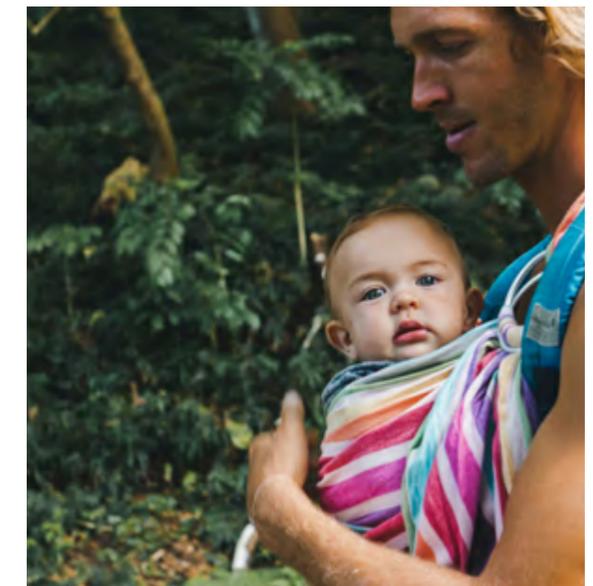
## BABYWEARING SERVICE

Our newest service is the Babywearing Service which offers guidance and help in choosing the appropriate sling for parents and baby. When Covid restrictions allowed, workshops on babywearing were incredibly successful and in high demand. In 2022 we will begin to build a sling library and begin renting out slings for parents. As Covid allows, more workshops will be held, and help offered to BCT members.

do still come to our volunteer via email. As in the past, some demands come through general postnatal services or BCT information services which are then forwarded to our Experiences Register volunteer.

## CLOTH NAPPY SERVICE

Despite the pandemic this service is running very well. Contacts are made by email and our volunteer continues to be active and to give out very helpful information, including online demonstrations to members. Cloth nappy use is expanding in Belgium making this an easier option for parents.



# GROUPS

2021 has been a relative quiet year for BCT groups. Due to the second and third wave of the pandemic and regulations put in place by the government, chances of getting together among parents were not many. Local groups leaders have played a very important role in keeping the BCT community together. It was not possible to meet up regularly but the social channels of the groups such as Facebook and Whatsapp chats remained always very active. Members were able to exchange advice on everything and also to find 'virtual help and support' when needed. A big thank you goes to all the wonderful volunteers who run the groups and playdates. As the BCT is a membership based organization run by members for members, it meant a lot that during this difficult time BCT members continued to renew their membership.

All our groups are different and the group leaders found many ways to make interactions and communication more accessible and efficient. Some of them used Facebook, others preferred Whatsapp chats or Messenger chats.



Sing & Play at the Clubhouse

## BCT CLUBHOUSE

All families that have been to the Clubhouse fall in love with our hub. Unfortunately, until May the Clubhouse could not be used for our usual social group activities and social gatherings due to the pandemic. In order to give our members access and have the venue used, the BCT Board came up with a new format 'The Second Living Room'. One family at a time had the possibility to book a 3-hour slot and enjoy the space. It became very popular among the members and this format was kept during the fourth confinement between November 2021 - February 2022. However, after the second lockdown, many members (especially among the ones that enjoyed the Clubhouse with their families) stepped forward to host regular playdates. So between May and October eight weekday playgroups were offered as well as regular get-togethers on weekends such as the Flowerpot Gang, support and interest group meet-up and the Kids' Cinema Club. Bumps & Babies, Toddlers in Motion, Little Gym and Dads' playgroup were the most popular weekday playgroups.



Auderghem / Boitsfort / Watermael Group

## LOCAL GROUPS

BCT has **13 local groups** in Belgium, the most active ones are in and around Brussels. With a lockdown in the first half of the year and ongoing confinement on different levels right until the end of the year it was extremely difficult for our local groups to organize activities. However, the groups stayed active, managed to navigate the ever-changing confinement regulations and kept providing socializing opportunities whenever government regulations would allow. Thanks to the local groups' social chats (on Facebook and WhatsApp), BCT members were always connected and able to exchange advice and recommendations and propose spontaneous get togethers and walks in the parks. Many of our local group volunteers put a lot of effort in connecting local members with each other.

We had new group leaders stepping forward to revive the **Tervuren** and **Leuven** groups. A warm thank you to the longterm **Waterloo** group leader who found a new group leader before resigning.

The **Central group**, which is coordinated by an enthusiastic group leader, is connected through various Facebook groups as well as on Messenger chats. Not many meetups were organized due to the confinement but the group represents a huge support and informative source for its 50-60 members. Many new mums have never even met in person but they are virtually well connected!



Flowerpot Gang at the Clubhouse



Central Group



Ixelles Group

The **Ixelles/St.Gilles/Forest group** continues to be a great local group of support and information for families. The group leader sends a weekly newsletter full of activities. Walks and meetups are regularly offered. Members mainly communicate through a very active WhatsApp group.



Wouwe Group

**Woluwe group** is run by a successful small leadership team, well organized and full of ideas. They support and coordinate the activities and meetups for one of BCT's largest local groups. Huge effort went into organizing the very successful BCT participation in a charity run for breast cancer research in the neighborhood. The participation was organized in memory of the late group organizer who passed away at the beginning of the year from breast cancer.

**13**  
LOCAL  
GROUPS

**5**  
SUPPORT  
GROUPS

**11**  
INTEREST  
GROUPS

## SUPPORT GROUPS

There are **5 BCT support groups**, which offer information, support and the chance to connect for members that are in a similar life situation. The current groups are made up of Parents of NICU babies, Pregnant and New Mums Drop In, Parents of Special needs kids, Disabled parents, Single Parents.

For **Rainbow parents** and **Twins and Multiples** we are still looking for new group leaders.

Some groups meet virtually on a regular basis, others are connecting on Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups.

The **NICU Group** had Zoom support sessions to talk about their experiences and what difficulties the members were facing during that time. They managed to meet at the Clubhouse during the summer and early fall.

Due to its specific nature, the **IVF group**, is open to non-members, too. The current group leader is very active, proposing regular, mainly virtual meet-ups and trying to accommodate as many group members as possible to participate and get-involved. At the moment, 10 parents take part in the meetings. They also met in person once at the Clubhouse.

**Pregnant and New Mums Drop In** offers regular warm and welcoming Zoom get-togethers to support new or expectant mums. The Group Leader found that many families that became parents during the pandemic were faced with strong feelings of loneliness and lack of community. Bi-weekly virtual meetups helped to connect these parents during the pandemic.

## INTEREST GROUPS

The BCT currently offers **11 interest groups**.

Increasingly popular are the language groups. We now have a **Croatian language group, Spanish language group, Italian language group, Polish language group and a Greek language group**. These groups offer an important opportunity for members' children to have playdates with other kids while being exposed to that specific language which is often only spoken by one parent. Due to the pandemic travelling became much more difficult, which meant there were not many chances for parents to visit their home country and their family. New BCT language groups helped a lot in this sense. During the weekends, each group had the possibility to meet at the Clubhouse and organize different activities such as baby disco, playdates, brunch and parent meet-ups.



Croatian Disco Group

A very active dad revived the **Dads group** and hosted a regular playdate for Dads at the Clubhouse.

The **Feminist Parenting group** is very active on WhatsApp (18 members) and the members meet up once a month either at the Clubhouse or in one of Brussels' cafes. They discuss parent struggles, strategies, and concerns related to the stereotypes of sex and gender, social pressure to fit into binary boxes (pink for girls, blue for boys), hyper sexualisation of kids, and other topics related to the contemporary Gender discussions.

The **Working Mums Group** became very active organising monthly meet-ups for early coffee mornings or lunch in the Schuman area. A night out was also organized. The group leader not only coordinates the meetings but is very active in the group's Facebook group, too (182 members). Each week she lists events and kid friendly activities around Brussels.

A **Book Club** was started in 2021 featuring a feminist booklist. The group now has 29 members and meets regularly in-person or virtually.



Leuven Group

## PLANS FOR 2021

We do hope that the pandemic will slow down and allow families to mingle and socialize again. We are planning to make use of the Clubhouse for all our various groups including local, support and interest groups.

# EVENTS

Sadly, due to the continuing pandemic and with it the strict Covid safety regulations, 2021 saw a limited number of BCT events taking place.

At the start of the year, we had hoped to resume our fund-raising events such as our ever popular **Nearly New Sales**. Several planning meetings were held to discuss adapting the format of these sales, so they complied with regulations. Selling online, smaller more specialised sales at the Clubhouse, limited number of participants, to name but a few ideas that were considered. However, with the unpredictability of the situation and the fact that the sales have always taken a large team of volunteers and several weeks to prepare, it was sadly concluded that such sales were simply not feasible during these restrictive times. **It was agreed that the BCT would rather wait and maintain its reputation for high quality second-hand sales, rather than embark on a new format where we could not guarantee the same quality shopping experience.**

Together with the two cancelled Nearly New Sales in 2020, this has once again had a significant impact on our financial situation.

Nevertheless, thanks to the versatility and creative thinking of our volunteers, the BCT was still able to organise some events during 2021.

Our Funday committee developed a new concept of a **'click & collect' spring craft bag**. This allowed BCT member families to order a craft bag consisting of 6 different spring and easter themed crafts, pay by bank transfer and simply collect it from a location nearest to them. 75 bags were ordered in total, bringing in some valuable funds for the BCT but most importantly a lot of positive feedback from BCT families whose children thoroughly enjoyed making the crafts at home.



Halloween Party

During the summer when restrictions eased slightly, and members felt more comfortable meeting outdoors we were able to organise a **BCT Junior Cycling Event**. Children enjoyed lots of fun practising their manoeuvres around the slalom course and learning some very important safety skills.

Several of our local groups also held summer picnics. So, although the annual large scale BCT summer picnic was not organised again this year, the concept of the event was replicated on a smaller scale on a more local level.

It was a similar situation with regards to our annual **Halloween party**. A large event was not permitted under the government Covid restrictions, but instead the BCT events committee facilitated several smaller Halloween parties arranged at group level, either at the Clubhouse or at members' houses. Decorations and games were prepared, and groups could reserve the beautifully decorated Clubhouse for Halloween parties with a strictly limited number of participants. Thus, benefiting from the facilities and fun atmosphere but always staying within the strict safety rules.



Run for Ciara



Towards the end of the year when restrictions eased slightly the BCT was able to participate in one of its most emotional and team building events of its recent history. Our **'BCT-Run for Ciara'** team consisting of 66 runners (members and non-members) and numerous more supporters took part in the 'La Bruxelloise' charity running race. The team was dedicated to the memory of past BCT Woluwe local group leader Ciara O'Dwyer who tragically died of breast cancer in February 2021.

*The 'BCT-Run for Ciara' team raised over 7000 euros for breast cancer research at Saint Luc Foundation, over 70% of the event's total fund raising!*

In a year of separation and restrictions, this single morning and the support received from afar, highlighted that the community spirit of the BCT was still very much alive and our members showcased this to Brussels' local community. Everyone here at the BCT should be very proud of what we can achieve when we work together as one big family.

December saw restrictions ease further and allowed our events committee to organise one of our popular **Family Photoshoots**. 53 families came to the Clubhouse at allotted times throughout the day resulting in a wonderful selection of family portraits in time for the festive season.



Crafts for Christmas

Finally, we ended 2021 with the ability to hold a 'hybrid' **'Crafts for Christmas - a Funday event'**. Members could choose if they wished to book a slot to prepare the crafts at the Clubhouse or purchase a 'click & collect' craft bag where they could prepare the seasonal crafts in the comfort of their own home. 75 craft bags were ordered for collection and 30 children enjoyed making them at the Clubhouse.

**So, despite the ongoing Covid restrictions our volunteers did their utmost to maintain as many events as possible throughout 2021 but making sure all safety measures were adhered to.**



Jr. Cycling Event

# INFORMATION

In 2021 the Information team had two dedicated members who checked emails daily and endeavoured to answer the queries of members and non-members alike. Another team member had the responsibility for answering the BCT's information phone line until we switched to a cost saving prepaid mobile number in October.

The BCT Talks Coordinator is also part of the information team, whose role is to organise popular and varied talks for BCT members. The Covid-19 restrictions meant that only two talks were held at the Clubhouse in autumn, however, free online talks were given to members via webinar throughout the year.

## EMAIL QUERIES

In 2021, the Information team answered 221 email queries, compared with 204 in 2020 and 327 in 2019. The biggest number of queries was received between June and September, reflecting members' interest in the reopening of the Clubhouse and BCT activities following their suspension during the Covid19 pandemic. Many queries came from non-members who were moving to Belgium or who were looking for advice regarding schools or health care for example, which is possibly an indicator that members can find a lot of the advice they need from the BCT website or social media sites.

**221** EMAIL QUERIES | **15** PHONE CALLS



### TOP QUERIES

- Local Groups • Playgroups
- Childminders/crèches •
- Gynaecologists/new pregnancy/ Prenatal Courses • Schools • Health care in general • Breastfeeding
- First Aid Classes

The BCT Facebook group has grown much more in popularity and many members who would have emailed the Information team can now pose their questions to a larger audience and get a variety of responses through these channels.

## PHONE CALLS

The BCT phone line received 15 calls in 2021 compared to 19 calls in 2020 and 34 calls in 2019. People still inquire via phone, despite a growing preference to make queries by email or in our Facebook group. As in previous years, most calls came from non-members looking for practical information. These calls ranged from enquiries about prenatal courses, playgroups and the Belgian medical system to offers of collaboration. All callers new to the BCT were informed about the full range of BCT services and encouraged to visit our website for further information. As usual, we also received a few calls from people in need of a listening ear. At the end of such a call, we always signposted the caller towards additional sources of support.

## PLANS FOR 2022

The team plans to continue to answer emails and calls efficiently and to the best of its ability for the coming year. Team members communicate regularly via email, phone calls and online meetings to discuss issues and projects.

We continue to refer queries to other sources, such as the BCT local and Facebook groups, the Belgian Schools Network, embassies and the Community Help Service.



## TALKS

We offered two face-to-face talks at the Clubhouse in 2021, one in September on DIY Cleaning Products and one in October on Baby-wearing. With the Covid-19 restrictions causing Clubhouse closures, we continued to offer information sessions to members via online webinars. Members could participate, for free or for a fee, in talks and workshops such as:

How to invest in your retirement, Elimination Communication, Navigating Family Travel, Potty training tips, Job skills - Personal Branding, Baby-led Weaning, Teen Yoga.

These BCT events have been well-received, with more members able to attend them from the comfort of their own home. For some members, they also provided a welcome social contact and change in routine during ongoing restrictions caused by the pandemic.

A number of free online talks and in-person meetings are scheduled for 2022, including Style Masterclass, Baby Wearing, Job Skills: personal branding, Family Yoga and Estate Planning with Children. Non-members may attend these events for a fee.

We will also continue offering workshops for which participants pay a fee. Those scheduled already for 2022 are: Parenting with Positive Discipline, Painting, Sleep Consultations.

## MEMBER COURSES

Since 2016 we have been offering BCT Members' Courses in partnership with some of our members who are qualified in areas that are of interest to our wider membership.

As with BCT talks and workshops that were offered online, members were happy to continue following courses from home. For the first half of 2021, members could regularly attend online yoga (prenatal, postnatal, bedtime), Pilates and baby massage until some face-to-face classes resumed. From July, pre & postnatal yoga was replaced with pre & postnatal gym, at first in the Bois de la Cambre and later at the Clubhouse. From October, a new 3-part painting workshop for adults took place at the Clubhouse and was repeated in November at the request of members. A third series in December was postponed when the Clubhouse had to close because of Covid-19 measures. All other courses continued online.

## PLANS FOR 2022

We continue to offer those courses which have shown a consistent demand from members, notably Pilates, Baby Massage, Pre & Postnatal Exercise and Yoga. Return to work-related workshops, parenting skills and painting courses are also scheduled.

Feedback from members has been very positive. Participants have enjoyed learning and meeting like-minded people, both online and at our premises.

# COMMUNICATIONS

## SMALL TALK: THE MEMBERSHIP MAGAZINE

Due to the pandemic and the significant decrease of income caused by it the Board decided in early 2021 to cut costs by changing the production schedule from bi-monthly to quarterly. In the end we produced five issues in 2021 (January/February plus four seasonal issues). The new publishing schedule is early March, June, September and December.

For the Small Talk team this change came with some challenges, for instance balancing time sensitive event information covering three instead of two months and an influx of relevant content provided by our various contributors. Our new editorial team consists of longstanding members Alison Plater, Britta Appel and Shelley O'Brien. The team is managing this task efficiently and with a good eye for the needs and interests of our members. As in previous years, a wide range of topics relating to childbirth, parenting and family life were featured, providing relevant and valuable information and, at the same time, a voice was given to those members who were prepared to share their expertise and experiences with our membership.

The team consists of the editor plus two editorial assistants and five proof readers. The team is still looking for a new Display ads coordinator.

The liaison between volunteers and professional production companies and printers continues to work extremely well.

Display advertising has continued to be an important income stream for the BCT. Despite a generally difficult economic situation for many businesses in Belgium Small Talk managed to keep the majority of its long term advertisers and attracted some new ones. The number of adverts that were processed increased to 45 as opposed to 40 in 2020. The income went up to 7,700 euros compared to 6,000 euros in 2020.



## PUBLICITY AND PUBLICATIONS

Our Facebook page is the most important publicity tool for the BCT. It is not an exaggeration to say that our social media presence has been crucial for our organisation during the pandemic. The vast majority of our activities be it events and courses or group gatherings were set up with short lead time. With constantly changing safety regulations flexibility and quick and efficient communication has become key in promoting them to the public and to our members. The number of followers has again increased by about 600 to 4,300 at the end of the year. 337 posts and about 50 BCT events were placed on our Facebook page in 2021. In order to increase traffic on the page and to reach out to the wider expat online community the team regularly shares posts with Facebook expat groups in Belgium as well as our own Facebook groups. Furthermore, the BCT is now also present with an account on Instagram (64 posts) and Twitter (77 posts). Both are less frequently but nevertheless regularly fed with content.

We finally were able to update and revamp the unique Pregnancy in Belgium booklet which was a huge and time consuming undertaking and an important project that involved volunteers from different departments. Work on the new website proceeded considerably and we are hopeful to go online in the first half of 2022.

Additional projects the team worked on in 2021:

- BCT services and event listings were promoted throughout the year on all important community and expatriate websites/message boards in Belgium.
- We continued to work on reciprocal online references with organisations and businesses in our field of activity in Belgium (for instance with The Village.be and The Bulletin).
- Participation in the Family Day event of British School of Brussels
- In June the Clubhouse was featured by BRUZZ TV which was once again fantastic publicity for the BCT.
- About 100 publicity packs were prepared and distributed via the Pregnancy in Belgium sessions and by individual mailings.
- Cross-team support was provided, e.g. production of the Annual Report 2020, design and reprint of pre- and postnatal services flyer, design of posters and onsite and online publicity support for all events and activities.
- The Clubhouse crowdfunding campaign was further promoted and completed with significant funds raised mainly from our extremely loyal membership.
- The weekly newsletter continues to be an efficient and appreciated means of communication with our members. 41 weekly newsletters were sent out with an average opening rate of 44%.
- The publicity team organised the BCT's participation at the charity run La Bruxelloise to raise funds for research against breast cancer. The BCT team consisted of 66 runners (members and non-members) participating under the name "BCT: Run for Ciara" in memory of our late Woluwe group organiser Ciara who sadly died of breast cancer earlier in the year. The BCT team was extremely successful and collected over 7,000 euros in funds which was about 75% of all funds raised during this year's event. The BCT's team campaign consisted of a logo, buttons, a stall at the event, social media communication, a story book for children, a drawing competition, donated refreshments, games and more. In terms of publicity the campaign had a lot of exposure and reached out beyond Brussels' expat community.

## PLANS FOR 2022

We aim to go online with the new website by mid 2022. The new membership management system that is part of it offers many opportunities to improve the internal communication with our members. The next step will be to develop a concept for online advertisement opportunities on the website. Furthermore, we are looking at electronic options that could replace the BCT Book for newly joined members as we do not have the financial means to reprint this publication at the moment. Cutting costs in all areas will continue to determine all publicity activities. The publicity team still needs additional, active members in order to develop and implement some of the above mentioned plans and new projects to promote our organisation.



# ONLINE MEDIA

## Website @ Social Media

### WEBSITE FOR INFORMATION

Our website [www.bctbelgium.org](http://www.bctbelgium.org) provides information about the BCT, our services and activities, our courses and classes, and much more. It is often our first contact with potential new members. It allows them to join the BCT and provides existing members an easy way to renew their membership.

A small part of the website is restricted and accessible for members only. This Members' Zone provides specific information about groups, volunteers and events, such as contact details for group organisers, and places and times of events that are for members only.

Just like in 2020, the website also provided up-to-date information about the BCT's COVID measures in 2021, how to book the Clubhouse and information about the playgroups that took place when the Clubhouse was open.

### FACEBOOK FOR INTERACTION

In 2021, we saw another steady incline in numbers with **4,000 likes** and **4,300 followers on our Facebook page** ([www.facebook.com/bctbelgium](http://www.facebook.com/bctbelgium)). The Facebook page is a showcase for public information we want to share about our organization and events but also about parenting in general with articles from around the web.

The community of the **BCT Facebook group** ([www.facebook.com/groups/BrusselsChildbirthTrust](http://www.facebook.com/groups/BrusselsChildbirthTrust)) was once again a great way of supporting parents throughout the time when personal meetings were not possible. It is great to see how ready group members are to share their knowledge and lifehacks with other parents.

At the end of 2021, the main BCT Facebook group had more than **5,000 members**. There are many other BCT groups on Facebook that bring together the members of our local, support and interest groups. They provide information that is more targeted on certain areas or interests, so they complement each other.

### ZOOM FOR ONLINE CLASSES

The platform has helped us immensely to provide soon-to-be parents with the necessary information they needed – at a time when in-person classes were simply impossible. ZOOM has also made it easier for the BCT Board of directors to continue its work – no matter where they were at the time.

### INSTAGRAM TO SHOW THE BCT'S COLOURFUL SIDE

We wish we had more photos to show of the BCT Clubhouse on our **Instagram account bctbelgium** but with playgroups paused and events postponed, there were fewer photos than this great platform deserves. Yet, as many of our members are active on Instagram, it is the perfect medium to interact and show off some of our great photos of the BCT Clubhouse.

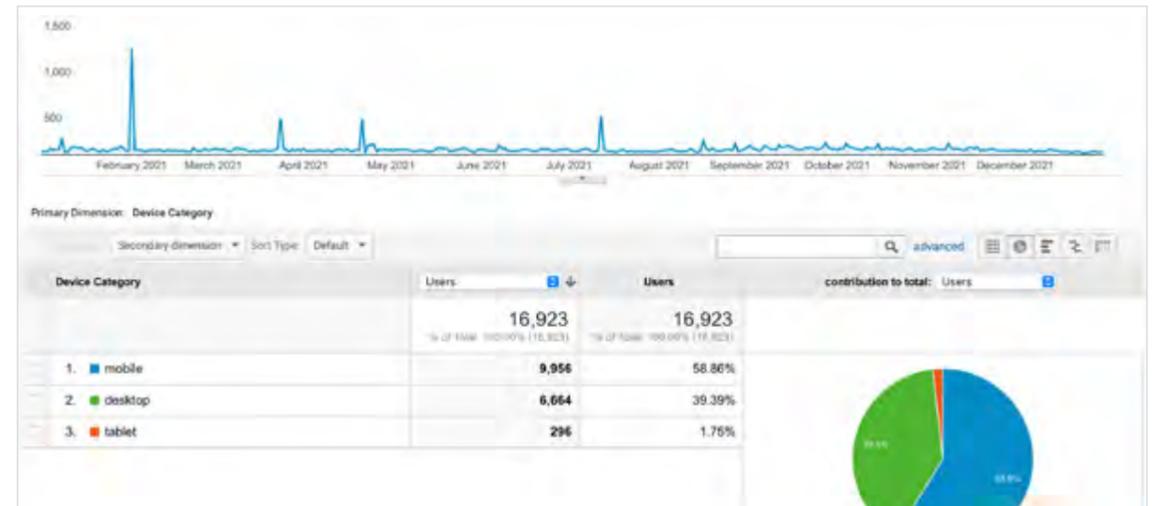


### TWITTER TO TALK ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING

If you prefer Twitter to Facebook to keep up with what's happening, why not follow **@BCTBelgium?** That way you won't miss the "Around the web" articles and other tweets we have for you.

With the help of our website, the Facebook page and group, our Zoom account, Instagram and Twitter, we were able to continue connecting people at times when isolation was vital. In the background we have been working hard on some website projects that we are more than excited to introduce in 2022.

### MOBILE USE IN 2021



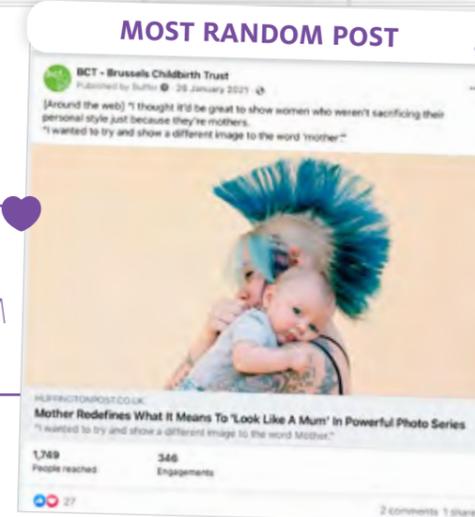
### PAGE VIEWS IN 2021



**337**  
FACEBOOK  
POSTS

**64**  
INSTAGRAM  
POSTS

**77**  
TWEETS



# BOARD of DIRECTORS

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



**PRESIDENT**  
Louise Nugent  
president@bctbelgium.org



**PAST PRESIDENT**  
Sandra Drechsel  
past-president@bctbelgium.org



**VICE PRESIDENT**  
Emily Roelandts  
vice-president@bctbelgium.org



**TREASURER**  
Natalja Guintsenberg  
treasurer@bctbelgium.org

## BOARD MEMBERS



**MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY**  
Mong-Tuyen Huynh  
membership@bctbelgium.org



**GROUP LEADER COORDINATOR**  
Chiara Troisi  
groups@bctbelgium.org



**INFORMATION COORDINATOR**  
Alison Plater  
info@bctbelgium.org



**EVENTS COORDINATOR**  
Lourdes Alvarellos  
events@bctbelgium.org



**COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR**  
Britta Appel  
publications@bctbelgium.org



**ONLINE MEDIA COORDINATOR**  
Sandra Drechsel  
webmaster@bctbelgium.org



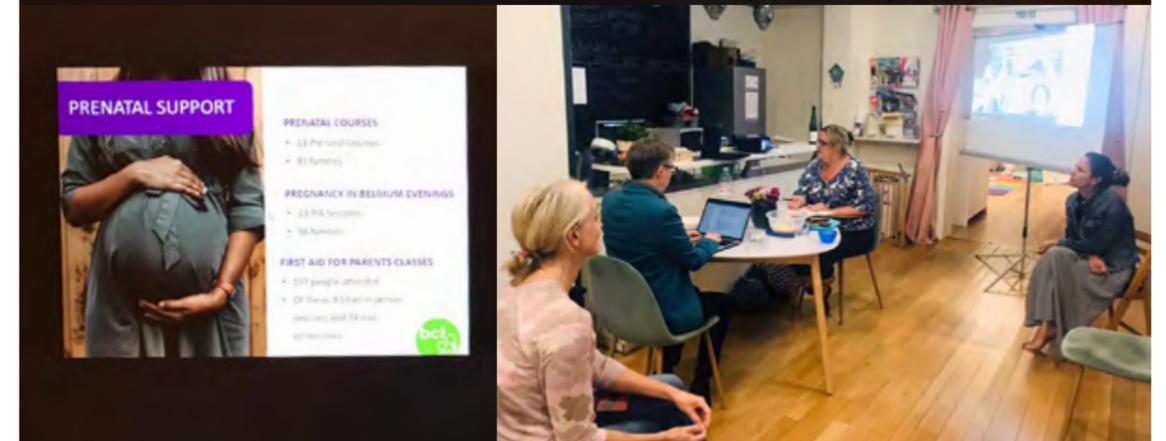
**VOLUNTEERING COORDINATOR**  
Shelley O'Brien  
volunteering@bctbelgium.org



**PRENATAL SERVICES COORDINATOR**  
Jill Hawkes  
prenatal-services@bctbelgium.org



**POSTNATAL SERVICES COORDINATOR**  
Aimee Backiel & Kirsten Nagle-Canton  
postnatal-services@bctbelgium.org



AGM March 2020

# FINANCES

The final accounts at the end of 2021 showed a loss of **€6.094** versus an expected loss of **€24.230**.

The main reasons, for the significantly (by **€18.136**) lower loss: Lower expenses in several areas and a higher than expected income in other areas. Cost cutting measures were implemented throughout the organization. Initially planned expenses and projects were put on hold, postponed or amended. On the income side, after years of decrease membership numbers went up and almost reached the height of 2019. This, the creativity of the Board to develop new sources of income, and a loyal membership that supported the BCT with generous donations were our biggest achievements.

## WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM? WHAT IS IT SPENT ON?

The BCT's **main sources of income in 2021** are the membership fees, prenatal services, display advertisements in Small Talk magazine, events and donations.

The BCT generated revenue from membership fees of €29.970. This is more than the budget of €24.500 and the revenue generated in the previous year: (2020) of €24.399.

The income from prenatal services (prenatal courses, First Aid classes and 'Pregnancy in Belgium' classes) was €30.125. With significant expenses in this area of €27.068, the profit was €3.057 which is more than last year: (2020) €2.371.

The display ad team generated income of €7.222 which covers 47% of the costs related to the production, printing and distribution of the magazine. This income was more than the budget of €5.000, and more than last year: (2020) €5.997.

Although Nearly New Sales could not be organized, the events team generated an income of €4.735 which was more than the budget of €2.500 and more than last year: (2020) €1.440. The BCT started to rent out the Clubhouse in Spring 2021. This new initiative brought in an additional €2.900 to the BCT revenues. It is lower than the budget of €7.500 but nevertheless covered 12% of the net rent paid in 2021 (€23.230). A crowdfunding campaign and call for donations resulted in €3.515 additional income. Member courses and postnatal services generated a stable income of €1.429 and €300, respectively.

On the **expenditure** side our premises and its maintenance are the biggest blocks of expenditure amounting to **€30.173**. Last year (2020) it was **€37.476**. The Budget for 2021 was **€42.580**. The lower actual cost can be explained by lower cleaning costs due to the closure of the Clubhouse, postponed or donated maintenance work especially in the Clubhouse garden, and the generosity of our landlord (Mr Roland Rousseaux), who reduced our rent by 50% over the first four months of the year when the second lockdown saw the Clubhouse closed only months after it's official opening.

The cost related to our prenatal services were **€27.068**.

The cost for the maintenance of the BCT website and investments in a new website was **€5.162**, which was lower than the budget of **€10.000**. The team managed to find a less expensive solution to build a new website, also by outsourcing our complex membership management system.

Philippe Vandebek from Rudi Swings bvba, Boekhouding - Fiscaliteit has checked and approved the end of year statement closing 2021. →

## FINANCIAL REPORT (ACTUALS & BUDGET 2021, ACTUALS 2020, BUDGET 2022)

AREAS	2021 Actuals				2021 Budget				2020 Actuals				2022 Budget			
	INCOME ACTUALS	EXPENSES ACTUALS	RESULT	INCOME BUDGET	EXPENSES BUDGET	RESULT	INCOME ACTUALS	EXPENSES ACTUALS	RESULT	INCOME BUDGET	EXPENSES BUDGET	RESULT	INCOME ACTUALS	EXPENSES ACTUALS	RESULT	
1. membership	29.970	-921	29.049	24.500	-1.000	23.500	24.399	-1.273	23.126	30.000	-1.000	29.000	30.000	-1.000	29.000	
2. magazine	7.222	-15.197	-7.975	5.000	-15.950	-10.950	5.997	-15.948	-9.951	5.500	-13.100	-7.600	5.500	-13.100	-7.600	
3. IT		-5.162	-5.162		-10.000	-10.000		-10.150	-10.150		-5.000	-5.000		-5.000	-5.000	
4. publicity		-754	-754		-1.000	-1.000		-1.358	-1.358		-1.000	-1.000		-1.000	-1.000	
5. premises	2.900	-30.173	-27.273	7.500	-42.580	-35.080		-37.476	-37.476	5.000	-40.650	-35.650		-40.650	-35.650	
6. member courses & groups	1.429	-115	1.314	1.500	-100	1.400	1.599	-96	1.503	1.400	-300	1.100		-300	1.100	
7. board		-2.202	-2.202		-3.200	-3.200		-3.358	-3.358		-2.900	-2.900		-2.900	-2.900	
8. prenatal support	30.125	-27.068	3.057	28.900	-26.300	2.600	28.820	-26.449	2.371	31.900	-28.200	3.700	31.900	-28.200	3.700	
9. postnatal support	300		300	400	-400	0	360	-163	197	400	-500	-100	400	-500	-100	
10. volunteers		-173	-173		-900	-900		-435	-435		-1.000	-1.000		-1.000	-1.000	
11. funday/events	4.735	-2.863	1.872	2.500	-500	2.000	1.440	-259	1.181	6.050	-3.800	2.250	6.050	-3.800	2.250	
12. nearly new sales			0			0		-138	-138	19.000	-14.500	4.500	19.000	-14.500	4.500	
13. information team			0			0	76	-22	54			0			0	
14. bank charges/interest		-789	-789	100	-1.000	-900	87	-794	-707	100	-1.000	-900	100	-1.000	-900	
15. paypal		-873	-873		-1.000	-1.000		-1.018	-1.018		-1.000	-1.000		-1.000	-1.000	
16. other/donations	3.515		3.515	10.000	-700	9.300	2.270	-185	2.085			0			0	
<b>Total</b>	<b>80.196</b>	<b>-86.290</b>	<b>-6.094</b>	<b>80.400</b>	<b>-104.630</b>	<b>-24.230</b>	<b>65.048</b>	<b>-99.122</b>	<b>-34.074</b>	<b>99.350</b>	<b>-113.950</b>	<b>-14.600</b>	<b>99.350</b>	<b>-113.950</b>	<b>-14.600</b>	

ACCOUNTS	1.01.2021	31.12.2021
PayPal	792,29	0,00
BNP bank accounts	65.624,14	60.413,45
BE09 0019 0450 3757	1.929,91	977,12
BE24 0019 0494 8038	3.065,00	3.585,00
BE27 0019 0495 1573	0,00	0,00
BE70 0019 0495 6425	0,00	0,00
BE41 0343 1742 7310	60.629,23	55.851,33
BE75 3636 1476 7751	4.440,00	4.440,00
<b>Total</b>	<b>70.856,43</b>	<b>64.853,45</b>

## FORWARD LOOK TO THE BUDGET 2022

The BCT does not intend to make a profit, but has accumulated profits over some years in the past. Unfortunately, 2022 started in another lockdown with related government restrictions which makes the planning of social activities, courses and classes unpredictable. This year another overspend of €14.600 is projected.

Most of our efforts will again be in the area of increasing our membership base further.

We hope to be able to offer in-person Prenatal courses, First Aid and Pregnancy in Belgium classes again. Although the concept of offering online courses will stay part of our portfolio we are aiming to offer some of the sessions in the Clubhouse in order to boost prenatal services income and attract new members.

We will continue to rent the Clubhouse to members for private parties. This new initiative started promisingly and shows potential for development.

After two years without a Nearly New Sale we are planning to hold an Autumn 'Nearly New Sale' in 2022.

We expect that income from the Display Advertising Team will still cover up to 30% of the costs related to the production, printing and distribution of Small Talk magazine.

Our new website and membership management system will make website navigation and online payments as well as internal communication with members easier and we hope this will also have a positive effect on potential new members and course participants to take part in our offer and join the BCT.

A big "thank you" needs to go out to the various volunteers who took on additional projects throughout the year and for each person who supported the BCT so generously by donating directly and via our crowdfunding appeal.



# BCT *at a* GLANCE

# 685

MEMBERS

*\*Current at time of printing*

Here at the BCT we are all about family!

We are a volunteer-run not-for-profit social and support network for families and parents-to-be offering prenatal courses, postnatal services and a wide variety of activities and parenting resources in English. With currently **685 member families** from **70 nationalities** we are one of the largest international family communities in Belgium.

**90** VOLUNTEERS *(and counting!)*

**13** LOCAL, **11** INTEREST, **5** SUPPORT GROUPS

221 Email Queries

**64** Instagram Posts

*Instagram/bctbelgium*

**190**

parents-to-be  
in prenatal  
courses

**67,000**

*views on [www.bctbelgium.org](http://www.bctbelgium.org)*

**152**

People attended  
the First Aid classes

**5,000** MEMBERS IN  
OUR FACEBOOK GROUP

**13**

Pregnancy in  
Belgium Evenings

**15** Clubhouse Playgroups

**1/3** ENGLISH MOTHER TONGUE / **2/3** OTHER LANGUAGES

*Countless parent and baby meet-ups, park playdates, member course sessions, zoom meetings etc.*





**BrusselsChildbirthTrust (BCT)**  
asbl/VZW 466669572

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