



■ Shake on it – Boys' Brigade captain Chris Davies teaches Lewis Bishop, eight, the group's handshake Pictures: ANNA LUKALA BZDSA3

For these boys, life's not all Wiis and MP3s

- Island brigade expands with a new junior section
- Group covers Christian teaching alongside sport

By MIKE MINERS
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IN an age where young people are demanding the latest computer games and MP3 players, a traditional organisation is determined to show it is still relevant.

The Boys' Brigade on Canvey is aiming to expand and bring new members to its recently relaunched junior section for boys aged eight to 11 years old.

It still offers football, crafts, music and holidays in a bid to combat the boredom many youngsters across south Essex complain about.

But it has also modernised, with a new, more relaxed, uniform and nights where the boys play against each other on PlayStations and Nintendo Wiis.

Chris Davies, of Central Avenue, Canvey, signed up to the brigade when he was five, and 23 years later he is still very enthusiastic.

He is the captain of the 10th South East Essex Company, which meets in Leigh Beck Baptist Church in the island's High Street.

He said: "Generally a lot of boys don't know about the Boys' Brigade so a lot of the boys don't have preconceptions."

"They tend to come down once to find out about it, and then they find they want to get involved. We just want to get the name out there again, get people to know about us and that we're still existing."

This week the company relaunched the junior section to complement the work already going on with its 11-plus group.

He said: "At the moment, numbers are around half a dozen and we want to boost the number of



■ Fun – Bradley Bailey, nine, and Lewis Bishop, eight, bake cookies with lieutenant Richard Davies and captain Chris Davies BZDSA9

juniors aged eight to 11, who will then progress on to the next group.

"We are very optimistic about it because we offer fun and excitement to the boys with many activities and even camps, as well as the Christian teaching."

He is determined there is a place for the Boys Brigade in modern society and it is not an outdated concept.

He also said each company has small differences, which reflect the culture of the local community and the activities are developed in response to the boys' interests.

He added: "Every boy gets to grow and thrive at our meetings."

"The organisation is relevant today because it helps to form a positive image of youth."

As the name states, the organisation is for boys only.

Girls can join the sister organisation, the Girls' Brigade.

Chris says the biggest difference with organisations like the Scouts is the Christian teaching at every meeting.

He added: "A typical hour-long meeting will start with a moment's prayer, then we play games, mind



■ Ball boys – the group plays a game. Activities include mind games as well as sports such as football and cricket BZDSA6

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"Then we will do some badge work, which gives the boys something to aim for, and just recently one of the activities we had the boys doing was making pancakes."

"It was a fun activity and we could also explain the relevance of

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Lent at the same time, and at Easter our activities will include eggs."

Boys from other faiths are unlikely to be refused entry but Chris stresses it is a Christian organisation and every meeting will include some Christian teaching.

All the brigades have one objective, which is: "The advancement of

Christ's kingdom among boys and the promotion of habits of obedience, reverence, discipline, self-respect and all that tends towards a true Christian manliness."

Bradley Bailey, nine, of St Christophers Close, Canvey, has been a member since September.

He said: "The football is great and another good thing was the house party when we had fun with another company."

Former member Lewis Vincent, 16, of Athol Close, Canvey, turned up to support the relaunch.

He said: "There is so much to enjoy. You make friends, have fun and I enjoyed the camps as well."

"In fact I enjoyed every bit of it." The Boys' Brigade was formed in 1883, 24 years before Baden-Powell started the Boy Scouts, and spread quickly across the country.

It has about 300 members across south Essex, with companies in Southend, Thorpe Bay, Wickford, and Thundersley, among others.

As captain of the Canvey group, Chris will be running the weekly meetings in the church's hall between 7pm and 8pm. For details, call him on 07754 829223.