

## **An overview of Safe Families**

At Safe Families we know that churches are committed to making a positive impact in their local communities, and that church leaders long to see the Godly potential in their members realised. We share these passions. As a team we are committed to serving local churches in all manner of ways, however as organisation our work is specifically focused on assisting churches in their efforts to support local families who are facing life alone without the friendships and support networks that others would typically rely upon.

Safe Families offers support, hope and belonging to people who would otherwise be facing life alone. We partner with churches to link children, young people and families with volunteers, primarily from churches, to create relationship and connection, working on the principle that 'everyone deserves to belong'.

Our hope is that the Church makes the very most of the incredible potential it holds to have a profound impact on the way our nation cares for the lonely and the marginalised; particularly children and families. We believe that churches are the ideal community in which to develop genuine belonging, with trust and authentic connection and our purpose is to encourage and resource the church to offer hope and belonging to all.

In partnership with Local Authorities and Churches, and primarily through a network of trained and supported Christian volunteers, we are able offer bespoke packages of support to families in crisis or in need. We want the families we support to thrive and our hope is that they will reach their full potential; that they feel valued, enabled and empowered. That through the support they receive from Safe Families volunteers they will feel empowered to provide safe and nurturing homes for their children.

Since we began in 2013, Safe Families has recruited, trained and supported over 5,000 volunteers, linking them to isolated families in their community. We have worked with churches to support 7,217 families, 10,427 adults, 16,819 children and provided 9,372 nights of hosting.

### **Our Target Beneficiaries**

Safe Families have 3 target beneficiaries:

**Families:** The families we work with often face multiple challenges and are struggling to cope. Families benefit from being seen, heard and understood which will help improve their self-esteem and confidence. This enables them to access services and activities available in the local community. Our hope is that families can reach their potential, that they feel valued, enabled and empowered; that through support they are able to provide safe and nurturing homes for their children.

**Churches:** We currently work with 1,500+ churches across the UK and the vast majority of the support families receive is delivered by church members. Church leaders regularly report a significant positive impact on the life of their church when partnering with Safe Families.

**Volunteers:** We invest in volunteers and empower them to provide support and build friendships with families that make a positive impact. The volunteers we work with benefit from expert training and coaching from training professionals and many enjoy the opportunity to meet families and

develop meaningful friendships with them that lead to significant positive changes, for the volunteers as well as the families.

### **How support is delivered and by Whom**

Safe Families partner with churches to recruit and train volunteers who provide support with coaching, input and safeguarding from Safe Families staff. The support brought by the Safe Families volunteers comes in three forms, which are frequently blended into an all-round package.

Families are befriended by volunteers, finding the core of a community that cares in which they belong, supporting them to stabilise their families and get on top of the parenting that they are finding so challenging. Where needed, volunteer families 'host' children and young people from these families for overnight stays to allow space, support and an opportunity for both family and the children to recover. This is backed up with a wider community of support from Safe Families' volunteers providing resources of time, toys and household goods, and more besides to help families to lift themselves out of the practical problems that face them.

### **Collaborative Working**

Safe Families are committed to partnership working and to developing strategic collaborations with others. We know we can't do it alone so we invest in strong, honest and honouring partnerships with over 1000 churches, nearly 50 local authorities and a number of faith and secular organisations who share similar aims, objectives and values. We would be delighted to hear from any church, organisation or individual who would like to discuss working with us or just wants to know a little more about the way we work.

### **Outcomes and Evaluations**

We want to ensure that all we do is safe and effective. We achieve this through our Church facing evaluation tool, our purpose-built family and child outcome hexagons, and through external evaluations. We also routinely collect both quantitative and qualitative data from volunteers and our Local Authority partners and conduct feedback surveys with families, Local Authority partners and Volunteers at the end of every support.

We are particularly concerned with tracking the outcomes for the families we support and we do this by tracking changes across six key domains.

- **Social Networks and Support:** Are there people around that parents and their children need and want. How integrated they are in the local community; the ability to access facilities and places that are important to them.
- **Well-being / happiness / emotional health:** How the families feel. Their emotional resilience and coping strategies.
- **Parental Confidence and Self-esteem:** How parents feel about themselves; confidence to parent, access new places, make new friends and facilitate child-oriented activities.
- **Home Environment and meeting physical needs:** Providing a safe, comfortable and appropriate environment for the family that supports and aids positive child development.

- Family Relationships: Parent – child emotional engagement/attachment, the ability to offer appropriate attention and encouragement in order to meet their child’s emotional needs.
- Positive Parenting: Having the right practical tools, strategies and knowledge that support positive parenting practices.

A recent external evaluation of our service by expert social impact and evaluation organisation Sonnet showed that 90% of families supported are prevented from escalating further within children’s services; with 52% of families referred showing de-escalation to lower levels of children’s services need and that the Local Authorities where we work have demonstrated a reduction of the flow of children into Local Authority Care of between 8 – 18%.

For families who were supported between 2021/22 our work has saved the public purse at least £47.8million however "These financial reflections are mere shadows of the deep, life-changing benefits enjoyed by families who find new opportunities, new focus, and new friends through Safe Families’ support. Enabling families to support, nurture and provide safe homes for their children is the really exciting story here”

### **Our learning from the intervention, and how it might be replicated**

Among the multitude of challenges faced by the 6,000+ children and 14,000+ families Safe Families volunteers have worked alongside in the past decade, there is one prevalent issue that presents time and again, namely loneliness. When any other issue is combined with this one, regardless of the family’s social and economic demographic, the impact on that family is exponentially increased.

The antidote to loneliness is belonging, which Safe Families define as being seen, heard and understood. The more a person has a sense that they belong to somewhere, something or someone, the more they feel they are valued for who they really are. Their ‘self-talk’ is positive and constructive and thus they are more willing to show their true personality, their skills & gifts and their frailties. The result is that they are more likely to thrive personally and collectively with others and to achieve their God given potential.

Our key learning is that while many of the major issues that families face require specialist intervention, loneliness, as damaging as it is, can be combated through something we can all provide; namely the offer of belonging. The church, as the body of Christ, is uniquely placed to offer the belonging that people so desperately need to thrive and so our encouragement to all churches is to intentionally and proactively place more emphasis than ever on building belonging, alongside their exiting missional efforts. Safe Families have significant expertise in that and would be delighted to chat further with churches.