

A photograph of a woman carrying a young child on her back. They are in a grassy field, and the scene is backlit by a bright sun, creating a warm, golden glow and lens flare effects. The woman is wearing a dark top, and the child is wearing a striped shirt. The overall mood is peaceful and affectionate.

BUILDING STRONGER FAMILIES

F Family
S Support
W Work

THE SUSSEX CHARITY FOR CHILDREN
SINCE 1870

A STRONG FAMILY

FOR EVERY CHILD IN SUSSEX



“A strong family for every child in Sussex”. This is the single aim of the Chichester Diocesan Association for Family Support Work (FSW). Set up to help those on the margins of society - those least able to support themselves - FSW works with families who are most at risk of slipping through the safety net offered by the state, and supports parents as they try to ensure that their children have the best start in life.

As it is harder than ever for families to access support from statutory children’s services, a void has developed in the provision of long-term holistic care by a single organisation. With a number of organisations offering specialist care focusing on age, health, poverty, debt or housing, a family can slip through the safety net as it moves between services.

When a family is on the edge it needs an organisation that will work with them to identify not just a single solution to one issue but a long-term strategy that will ensure the family is able to move forward as a whole. FSW and its traditional model of Social Work offers an alternative for those families who are living with complex needs.

THE FAMILY HOME...



Our service has evolved over 125 years of working with families and is based on strong levels of understanding of the complexity that is often hidden behind the closed doors of the family home. It is in fact within the family home that most of the meetings between FSW Support Practitioners and parents take place.

As a result FSW does not offer radical new approaches to strengthening families or enabling them to develop coping mechanisms. The model we offer is traditional, old-fashioned Social Work. The recognition that for many families, the complexities of modern life leave them struggling, supports our received learning that the involvement with a family will go in cycles.

Our initial engagement with a family will usually begin with intensive work with the family as a whole and one-to-one with individuals. Under the guidance of a professionally qualified Family Support Practitioner, they then develop coping mechanisms, and together they will devise and implement a unique recovery plan before building on its successes and achievements to develop into a stable family unit. These are three simple steps, but ones that for some families can take years to develop. This highlights another crucial element of FSW's service, which sets us apart from other organisations - it is not time-limited.

Once a family is stable and thriving the Practitioner will move on. Sometimes this is after a few months, but it may be years before that family can move forward, and FSW never leaves a family without a point of contact should they wobble or need more intense support in the future.

So why is FSW best placed to deliver this kind of service to families? The African saying, "It takes a whole village to bring up a child" sums up our approach. In a society where we see families becoming fragmented because of the pressures placed on them, the need for a whole community to support a child as they grow up has never been greater. The combination of professional staff (supported by our volunteers) working in conjunction with other statutory and voluntary agencies enables FSW to provide a strong service to the families we work with, and to be focused on the goal that our services will be available in every part of the Diocese of Chichester.

A photograph of a child and an adult looking at a target on a bow. The child is on the left, and the adult is on the right. The target is in the center, and the bow is on the left. The image is overlaid with a green tint.

OUR GOAL...

FSW has set itself the target of providing a Family Support Practitioner for every part of Sussex within 5 years. In September 2017 the organisation took the first steps to achieving this by approving a £200,000 investment in income-generating activities over a two-year period. This includes the appointment of a new fundraising team with the aim to double the Association's income in three years. This will allow for the creation of new projects that will spread the catchment area of the Practitioners, with staff appointed to both rural and urban locations.

In identifying the areas of need we recognise that there are areas where we may not work because there is ample provision from other service providers. The placement of Support Practitioners will be in partnership with Parishes and Deaneries who have a good knowledge of services that are available locally and who are able to highlight the needs of their own communities. This localised information along with input from local schools will help to formulate the plans and profile for the Practitioner.

In addition to working along the ecclesiastical boundary lines, the Practitioners will be grouped together in teams that follow the boundaries of the District Councils of East and West Sussex as well as the City of Brighton and Hove.

The teams will comprise a Senior Support Practitioner or team leader supported by either full- or part-time Practitioners depending on the need and geography of the area covered. The Practitioners will be home-based with a central point of contact.

The focus of each Practitioner and team will be on partnership with the families to facilitate movement towards solutions for managing their issues, as well as the provision of direct emotional and practical support. Contributions from the Playwork Team are also integral to the service for some families in order to achieve growth in this frequently neglected but crucial area for a child's development.

OUR GOAL (CONTD.)

Playwork will continue to be a central part of the work that FSW delivers and the team will expand in line with the needs of individual areas. The Playwork model that we operate is led by employed staff who add to the Support Practitioner offering by running activity sessions that enable families to come to know FSW as a safe organisation with the professional skills to support them when they need help. Examples of the activities the Playwork team will run include messy play, after school clubs, school holiday sessions, Christmas parties, and regular carer and toddler drop-in groups.

The Playwork team is also involved in the one-to-one support for families by offering additional help with relationship building activities, such as supported days out for the whole family or individuals.

Playwork will continue for the first two years of this plan run by sessional staff under the supervision of the Community Services Manager. This will be under constant review, and should the demand for Playwork increase substantially we will develop a team of permanent staff who will lead in this area. The use of volunteers to support this work will continue and a volunteer co-ordinator will be appointed in year three, enabling an increase in volunteering opportunities for the Association.

Since our creation in 1890, FSW has offered food to families as part of the ongoing support that we give. If FSW is working with a family and there is need, we will supply supplementary food boxes on a fortnightly or monthly basis. This increases over school holiday periods when many of our families struggle to find the additional meals to replace school lunches. Alongside the provision of food, FSW has developed training programmes that show families how to cook and eat more healthily.

This includes demonstrating to parents how, with simple changes to their shopping habits, they can save money and improve their family's health. This valuable service is supported by local churches and communities with donations of food, and is currently run by volunteers with the help of office staff. This is under review and should the demand increase, FSW will seek to employ an individual to run the service. In addition to the food supplied we also offer toys, clothing and essentials to relieve the pressure on the budgets of the families. This is especially needed where there is debt or hardship through illness, unemployment and the breakdown of relationships.



THE PLAN...

Currently FSW is active in Hastings, St Leonards, Uckfield, Rotherfield, Eastbourne, East Grinstead, Haywards Heath, Cuckfield, Worthing, Bognor Regis, Rustington, Storrington and Pulborough. Analysis of the case load for 2017/18 is shown in the appendix.

Following the creation of the new fundraising team, the vision is that new projects will start to come on line in summer 2018 with Crawley; Brighton & Hove; Midhurst; Petworth & Westbourne, and Hurst Deanery as the first project areas to be developed and with support for work in these areas already evidenced. In addition, the work in Hastings will be reviewed with a focus on identifying further areas within this locality that need our support.

The first stage of delivery is to develop or strengthen a support group in the areas where the work will take place. The support groups provide local knowledge and demonstrate commitment to the project by raising funds, awareness and sharing information about community needs. This local "grassroots" element of our work is essential as it enables a Practitioner, when appointed, to build on the trust developed at this stage.

The support group will comprise local individuals representing churches of all denominations, community groups and schools. As the work develops, families that have benefited from our services will also be invited on to the support group. The bringing together of all sections of the community that are involved in supporting the family will be key to the success of new projects going forward.

Once in place a Support Practitioner will spend the first six weeks getting to know the community well. This includes making contact with schools, GPs, Health Visitors and other agencies based in the area who work with families. Working through local groups the Support Practitioner will start to interact with families.

A full-time Practitioner will be expected to hold a caseload of 25 families within three months, then over the course of a year it is expected that a Practitioner will have around 30/35 families for intensive support, and through group work and activities an additional 20 to 30 families.

MONITORING & EVALUATION

By using the Family Star monitoring tool which measures ten key areas of family life and relationships, FSW is able to track the effectiveness of its work with ease. The family and Practitioner complete the Star together so that the information entered includes not only the subjective view of the Practitioner but that of the family too, providing a more objective response than pure observation. This kind of monitoring tool is essential for FSW to measure its impact, especially as we do not work with a family to make a single intervention but because of the holistic nature of our work and the multiple and complex outcomes that may occur.

This regular assessment of our work with families, coupled with the wider range of families attending activity sessions, gives FSW the information it needs to measure the effectiveness of the project in an area. In addition to this FSW will invest in an added value model of evaluation. This will monitor the impact of our work in the local community by identifying the reduction in problematic behaviour by children in the community and school. We will also be able to assess and quantify the savings made to the public purse, for example by supporting a parent back to work or helping a child to return to mainstream education.

IN CONCLUSION

FSW will work with partners and funders to maintain current service levels as well as to develop new services in a planned and considered way. It is of course feasible that our plans will change over time as we strive to make our service flexible and responsive to the needs of families, but our overall aim will not change – to deliver the best, personal, support to our families for as long as they need us to.



APPENDIX

In 2017/18 FSW saw a 100% increase from the previous year in the number of families worked with. The three full-time and four part-time Practitioners carried out intensive support with 298 families. The referrals came from a wide range of professionals including schools, GPs, health visitors and other voluntary agencies as well as churches.

40% were lone parent families

65% of parents had a mental health issue

45% of children had additional educational needs

38% of families were going through family breakdown or divorce

26% of families had recent experience of domestic violence

25% of parents were ill or disabled

18% of families were in financial difficulty (debt or difficulty paying bills)

5% of families had recent experience of sexual violence

7% of children we worked with had been excluded from school

Children's ages:

15% of children were aged 0-5

50% of children were aged 6-11

25% of children were aged 12-15

10% of children were aged 16-18

In addition to this the Practitioners established over 50 groups and regular events aimed directly at supporting families in the form of support groups and drop-ins. There were 8 Christmas parties and a full programme of holiday activity clubs across Sussex run by the Playwork Team.

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