

COMMUNITY - CONNECTION - COURAGE

*A community project run by Faithworks,
supporting lone parent families*



2021-2022
Annual Review

FAITHWORKS

LISTEN | GIVE HOPE | ACT | INSPIRE



SMILE families relax by the river

COMMUNITY - CONNECTION - COURAGE

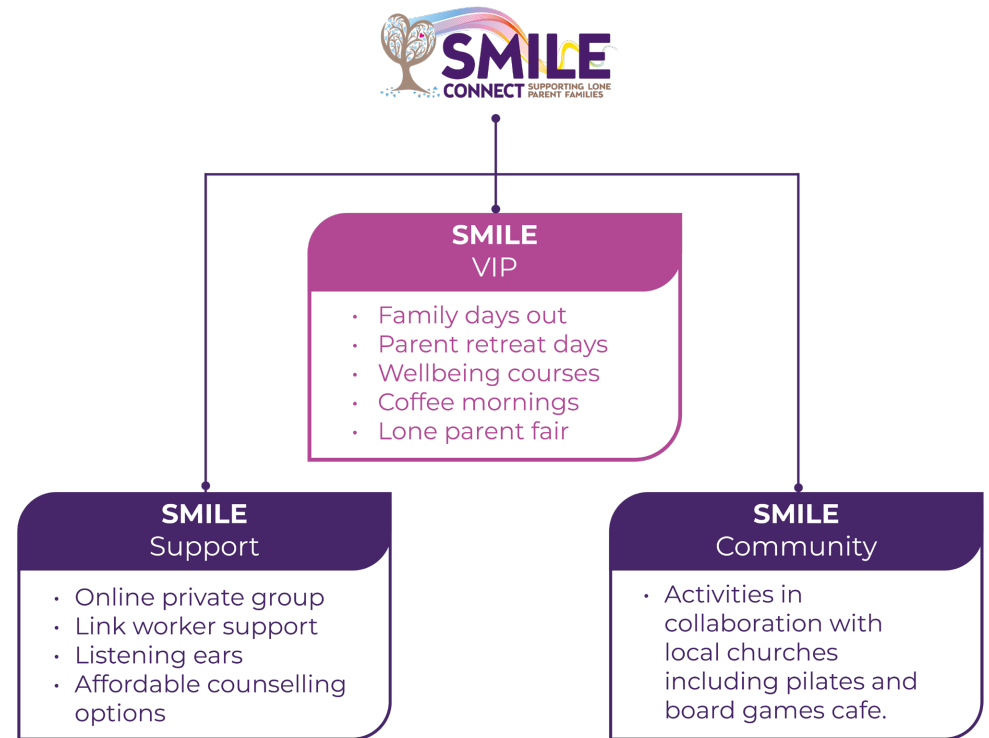
Here at SMILE we love seeing families live their best lives and having hope for the future.

We aim to create a **community** space that feels safe for people to be who they are and to feel listened to.

There is a saying: *"It takes a village to raise a child"*. We passionately believe that it takes community to help families flourish. When families **connect** with SMILE their support network expands, as they are given opportunities to meet with other organisations, families and groups.

For many parents, it takes great **courage** to make the initial connection. Once the brave individual takes that first step we are here to make the rest of the journey alongside them.

SMILE support is structured in to three main areas:



"I thought I was just coming to a day out with my kids but SMILE is so much more than that."
- SMILE Mum

D. Bold

Donna Bold
Link Worker

L. Whiteway

Lucy Whiteway
Assistant

R. Peck

Racheal Peck
Lead



3 is the Magic Number!



*"I have **grown** in confidence and Mums are very knowledgeable about different areas of life which has blessed me personally."
- SMILE volunteer*



ONCE AGAIN THIS HAS BEEN A YEAR OF GROWTH

1 Firstly, our team now has three members of staff - turn to page five to meet Donna.

2 Secondly, the number of families we have contact with on a regular basis continues to grow. Relationships are also flourishing between SMILE Mums and volunteers from the community.

3 Thirdly, we have been supported by and continue to grow relationships with more churches and local organisations. Individuals are also stepping forward to get involved.



Summer Activities 2021

34 Families attended

6 Summer events

40 Yellow Cook Bags per week given out

Social Media

300+ Facebook group members

700+ Facebook followers

3 Facebook support groups set up by SMILE Mums

SMILE 2021 - 2022

100+ Families Connecting with SMILE

Received

75 Families received Christmas gifts & yellow cook bags

250+ Christmas presents wrapped for parents & kids

8 Gardening Kits given out

Wellbeing

3 Coaching Circle courses

2 Step Out of the Traffic courses

2 Paddle boating days

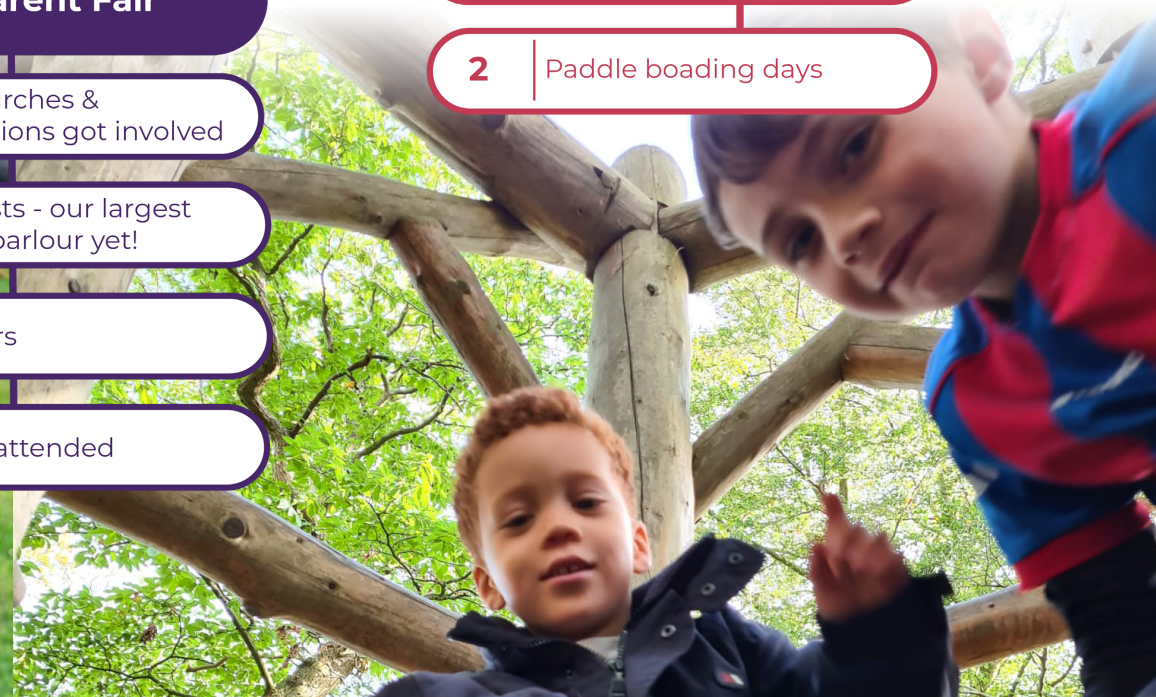
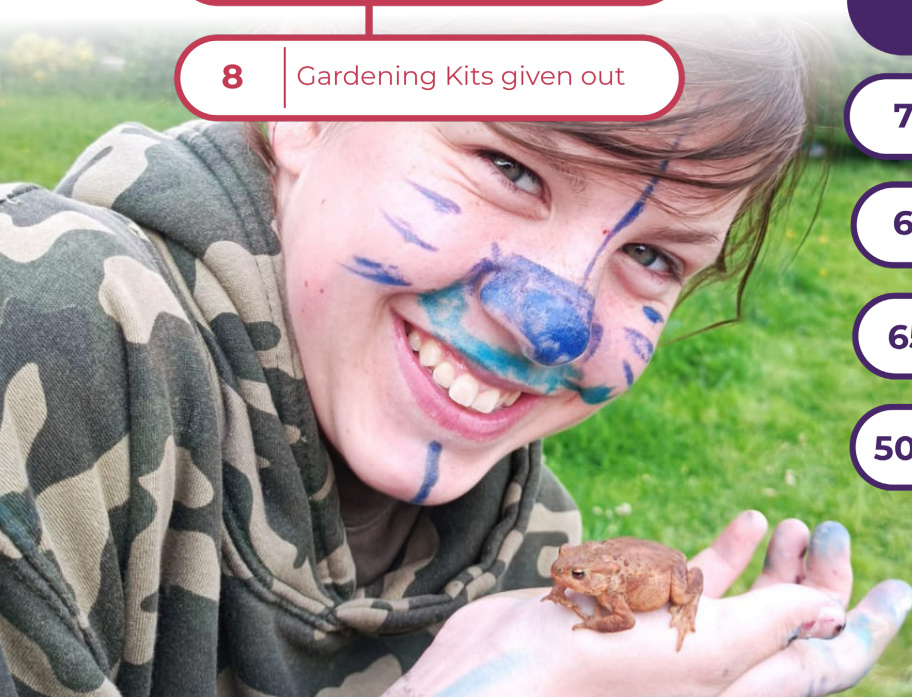
Lone Parent Fair

7 Local churches & organisations got involved

6 Pamperists - our largest pamper parlour yet!

65 Volunteers

50+ Families attended





Meet Donna

“Hi I’m Donna Bold. I joined Faithworks as a Link Worker on the SMILE team. I have been getting to know the SMILE community and working as a Link Worker since the start of 2022.

What a year! It’s been hugely varied, full of the highs and lows, fun and heartbreak that family life brings. I am getting to know so many truly courageous and inspiring people, I feel very privileged to be part of SMILE.

I have done all sorts of things in my previous work life with more than ten years as an advocate.

Advocacy is all about getting alongside individuals and supporting them to work out what they want in the face of difficult decisions and ensure their voice is heard.

I am also a trained Life Coach. Coaching involves asking

questions to help another with their thinking. Good thinking unlocks understanding and insight; it helps us make choices that are right for us and find the resources and courage within ourselves to take the next steps forward. It is these approaches that I want to share and use to support the SMILE parents. “

“SMILE are a massive support to us. We feel valued, special, important, loved, embraced, remembered, not alone. We have received so much love, kindness, friendship and support, when you feel so alone.

We have been blown away and truly blessed by everything SMILE has done for us. I could write an essay.” - SMILE Mum





Wellbeing Courses

This year we launched our Coaching Circle - this provides a safe space where the lone parents learn how to express emotion and how to deal with and move on from trauma. The aim is to increase the Mums' self-worth and social wellbeing. By the end of the course, the group also found that their children's wellbeing had increased as did the parents' desire to give back to their community.

"I am able to see where I have been going wrong and I believe that this is the first step."

The Coaching Circle provided helpful preparation for the follow up Step Out Of The Traffic course run by local organisation Courage to Thrive. Designed to equip participants with tools and practices to enable them to not only survive but thrive!

"I believe in myself a lot more, my anxiety and depression are subsiding."

As a result of the Coaching Circle we have started the SMILE library, including books on healthy boundaries; mindfulness, creative colouring, journalling and more!

"The course has helped in all areas of my life - emotional and physical choices, attitude, time to think of my values and boundaries."
- Courage to Thrive participant.

A number of SMILE families are dealing with multiple issues including social anxiety, which prevents them from connecting with the group. We support parents as they deal with the anxiety to enable them to connect with the SMILE community and step in to a more hope-filled future.

Finding "me" time as a Mum is tough but essential. We encourage this by providing high quality craft packs with strict instructions that these belong to the Mums and are not the family sharpie pens! These packs provide valuable tools for Mums' self-expression and relaxation.

SMILE provides safe, creative spaces for Mums through regular groups, days out and special events. This enables parents and their families to relax and take time to look after their own needs so they are in a stronger place for themselves and their children.



A brief respite!

Families in the SMILE community are encouraged to look out for each other and care for each others needs so that resilience is nurtured and they become stronger together.

Ashleigh's Story

"I'm now finding out who I am. But I'm also realising the mistakes I made in the past."

Ashleigh* joined the SMILE lone parent community 5 years ago.

She was going through many challenges including domestic violence, court hearings over her children, and suicidal thoughts. She was having to face these challenges alone.

Domestic abuse had always been a part of her family history, having witnessed her mum and grandmother live through this but not knowing that it's possible to come out the other side.

She explained: *"Me and Racheal didn't hit it off at the beginning because she was very gentle, loving, very kind and I saw that as patronising because I've never experienced it in my childhood... so I got defensive, aggressive and would walk out and then I'd ring her and apologise and be like 'am I still welcome?... [Racheal] has shown me, through SMILE, that there are professionals out there that won't give up on you and that don't believe everything that they hear about you."*

This was a key turning point enabling Ashleigh to experience acceptance within a safe community. Used to coping alone, Ashleigh explained that she had developed a strong sense of independence, feeling that she needed to look after her children without any support: *"Before I was very much 'they're my kids, they're my responsibility... I've got to find a way to do it on my own... Lucy and Racheal showed me that it's not a bad thing to ask for help when you need it. Also that it takes a community to raise a child."*

When experiencing suicidal thoughts, the SMILE team came alongside Ashleigh and shared various coping strategies and connected her with support networks including counselling. Through SMILE she also completed the Step Out Of The Traffic course, run by Courage to Thrive: *"Step Out Of The Traffic [taught*

that] you can be a Mum but you also need that time to yourself; whereas I was constantly running on empty because I wouldn't take that time for myself or ask for help."

"Because of the way that [Donna]... gives the course - she made it such a calm environment because we were all so chilled concentrating on our art... we ended up talking about anything and everything..."

Ashleigh found that sharing life experiences with other SMILE Mums built up her resilience: *"because we are so diverse and have been through such different things, it's great to get their perspective and advice... it's not just me that's gone through it... she's [another Mum] got through it and look at what a strong, independent woman she is, I know I can be that then clearly."*

When asked whether Ashley now feels differently about her future, she replied: *"Definitely. There's still loads of challenges coming but I know that I'll be able to get through them with the help and support of SMILE. The way that they have already helped me adapt, I know that I can only progress, it's only going to be positives now."*

She continued: *"It's just such a lovely, safe space that it has truly built my resilience up because before [SMILE] it was 'Ashleigh has kicked off... so Ashleigh's got to leave', whereas [at SMILE] it was 'this is how Ashleigh works so let's try and work with her and adapt to it. It's taught me that no matter what, there will always be a place in that community for me."*

They don't discriminate at all, there's so many ages, races, beliefs... and it's so amazing to get to know everyone's story. I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for the support and the help of SMILE and their courses."

**Name changed to protect identity*



**Our incredible volunteers gave
1,034 hours in time last year!**

Our Team

At SMILE our volunteers are a key part of our community, helping to walk alongside our families.

Our volunteers give their time and fully immerse themselves into this supportive community. We honestly could not do this valuable work without them.

If you would like to volunteer, please get in touch with us by contacting one of the team or by emailing: supportercare@faith-works.org.uk

“Working with families has taught me to love, build friendship, taught me to persevere in difficult times.”

- SMILE volunteer

Some of the SMILE volunteers relax at the beach



Growing Confidence

"It was my first year trying to grow anything and we have been extremely successful...around 20 cucumbers, peas, strawberries and Callum is enjoying the tomatoes.*

*It has been great to teach him how to care for plants and for him to learn how much care and patience it takes to grow the food we eat." - Emma**

The Get Going with Growing initiative was launched in preparation for the increase in the cost of living. Thanks to funding from Warbutons, families were provided with the garden tools needed to grow their own fruit and vegetables.

As a result, Mums started a conversation about growing their own food. They launched, "Grow your own with a SMILE", a Facebook group, to share tips and encourage each other. Seeds were also shared during coffee mornings enabling the group to grow a greater quantity of items.

The children now pick the fruit and vegetables they eat straight from the plants they grow. This provides three things: life skills in growing and managing food production, access to healthy, affordable food, and the development of patience.

Children are also emboldened to try new healthy foods because they have been involved with the growing process. Families working together have enabled this scheme to flourish so that they now have access to more healthy fruit and vegetables.

**Names changed to protect identities*



Callum* receiving his gardening kit

How Volunteering Provides Sarah* with “Me Time”

Sarah* first encountered SMILE through the Board Games Cafe. She explained: *“I’m not a lone parent myself but my partner is disabled, he’s in a wheelchair and we’ve got a seven year old son. So SMILE took me under their wing and invited me to different events they had going and have given me support as well.”*

During the lockdowns SMILE partnered with The Friendly Food Club to provide Cook Bags. Each week bags were distributed with all the ingredients to make the recipe of the week. A YouTube video was also released with guidance on how to make the recipe.



Drivers were needed to assist with delivering the bags to SMILE families and Sarah immediately volunteered. She explained that the bags were designed to encourage children to get involved with the cooking. Some families found their

children cooked the whole meal independently.

Another advantage of the Cook Bags is that they encouraged young people to try new foods, especially where they are involved with handling the food and cooking it.

“I love the fact that where they took me under their wing, it’s great that I can give back as a thank you to them. There’s so much pressure I’ve got at home with my partner being disabled, I’m his full-time carer.



For me to do this volunteering gives me a time where I am me again. I can have a time where I don’t have to think about anything at home. I can just have ‘me time.’”

One of the other things with the deliveries - it was great to be able to have that chat with people. You may have been the only person that they have seen for the last week. It was great to have those conversations with people and I’ve made quite good friendships out of it as well.”

When asked what she would say to anyone considering volunteering, Sarah said: *“I’d say go and do it. There are so many different things to do. It’s great to give back to Faithworks - they do so much for the community.”*

**Name changed to protect identity.*





Thank You

SMILE has been extremely blessed by our surrounding community this year, and we hope this continues, as the support is so vital to all we do.

Thank you to St Mary's Longfleet for once again choosing to financially bless SMILE. By being a mission church it is so encouraging to know that you understand our vision and see God's kingdom in what we do.

We would like to again express our gratitude to our volunteers. You really are a large part of everything that goes on and we would be lost without your dedication, discernment and love. Thank you.

Everything we do at SMILE is dependent on grants and gifts, for which we are so thankful for the many that we have been awarded, with special mention to The People's Health Trust and local business JP Morgan & Chase.

We would love to be less dependent on applying for large grants each year, and to see more regular givers from our local community. So to the five who already do, we salute you!

And last but by no means least, we would like to thank the many families who attend our activities, trust us with their stories and help our community to grow. All of you are such an inspiration.

Love Racheal

Racheal Peck - SMILE Lead

SMILE Connect

Become a supporter of SMILE by donating £10 or more a month
by setting up a direct payments - our bank details are:

Bank: CAF Bank

Account Name: Faithworks

Account Number: 00015300

Sort Code: 40-52-40

**Please list SMILE in the reference section*


Alternatively you can donate via our CAF Donate campaign here:
<https://bit.ly/FWSmile> or scan the QR code:



*All individuals shown in this publication have given their specific permission for their photographs to be used. Names with an * have been changed to protect individual's privacy.*

"I feel positive of the new changes I'm putting into practice"
- Courage to Thrive course participant



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Charity no. 1108714