

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



2022-2023
Annual Review

FAITHWORKS

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A lot goes on behind the scenes at SMILE

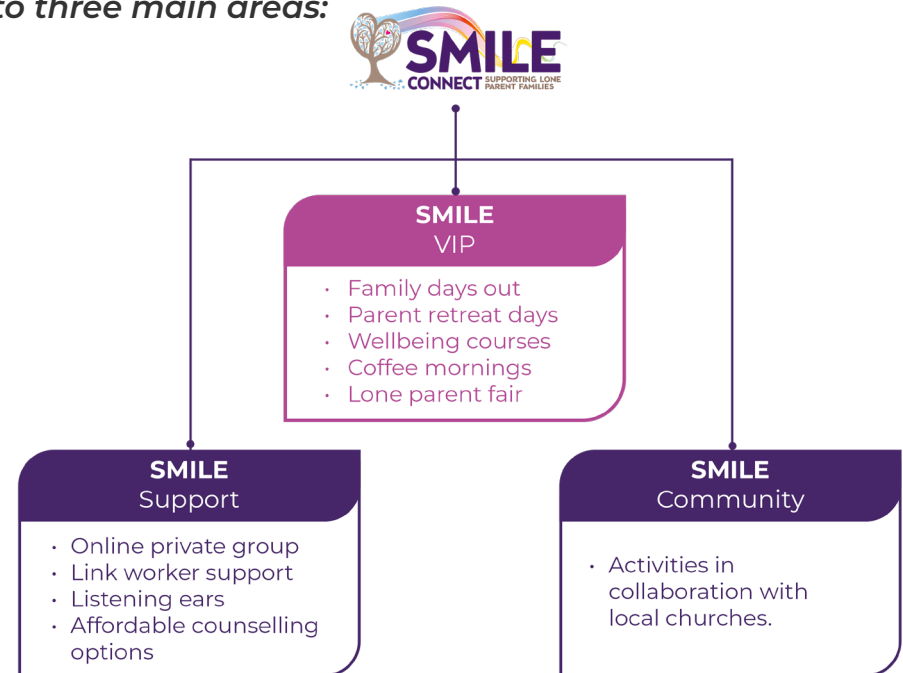
*“SMILE has grown so much in the last few years. Professional services are now referring clients to us - the needs are greater than ever.”
- Lucy Whiteway*

SMILE is a project aimed to build a friendly and supportive community for lone parent families in and around Poole.

Racheal leads the team and helps grow the project through local relationships. Lucy organises our events and volunteer team. Donna is our Link Worker who provides one-to-one support and signposting to other services for further family support.

A lot happens behind the scenes at SMILE - it can look like it is all fun and happiness. However, many of the families are dealing with complex and traumatic situations. Professional services have started to refer clients to us for support. We support many families with complex needs including

Our support is structured in to three main areas:



children with special educational needs. This is the main area where we witness peer to peer support and friendships flourish within our community.

SMILE provides support in all sorts of ways. For example, when a child was admitted to hospital, the Mum shared what she was going through with two friends that she had met at the SMILE Coffee Group. The friends informed the team - and between them all they were able to deliver items needed; nappies, food, wipes and deodorant for Mum, all knowing from experience that these items make a real difference.

Donna Bold
SMILE Link Worker

Lucy Whiteway
SMILE Assistant

Racheal Peck
SMILE Lead



3 Toughest Challenges

The 3 toughest challenges our SMILE parents report facing are:

1. Parenting alone
2. The general cost of living
3. Feeling isolated and lonely

We Asked a Lot of Questions!



35% of single parent families have no contact with the second parent

Back in January we asked our SMILE families for some feedback on our service*. The top 3 statements were:

1. SMILE makes me feel less alone
2. SMILE is a safe, online space for me to get advice from other lone parents
3. I feel part of a community with SMILE

Five families stated that SMILE was a lifeline for them.

“Many services are unable to provide those extra little bits that people need.” - Racheal

**Both positive and negative statements were included*



56% have access to a safe outdoor space to dry laundry

Almost half of our families say they do not have access to a safe outdoor space to dry their laundry. This lack of access impacts on their living conditions as they have to dry clothes indoors. This leads to increasing damp in their homes, higher energy bills with additional heating and cramped conditions with drying clothes indoors.



84% said that SMILE responds to the needs of those we support

We asked parents to vote for the top 3 things provided by SMILE that have most benefitted them, they said:

1. Friday Coffee Mornings
2. The Yellow Bags - a recipe and all the ingredients needed to make this
3. The SMILE annual Lone Parent Fair

Whilst we often use the term “parent”, in the context of SMILE, this can also mean carer, grandparent, foster parent or other family member - no-one with caring responsibilities is excluded.

Summer Activities 2022

38 Families attended

7 Summer events

40 Families received 2 meals over a 4 week period

10 Families attended a Friendly Food Club Cooking session

Christmas 2022

65 Families received Christmas gifts

250+ Christmas presents wrapped for parents & kids

2 Secret Santa events with St James' Church

SMILE 2022 - 2023

100+ Families Connecting with SMILE

Social Media

350+ Facebook group members

800+ Facebook followers

Other

1 Mums only swim day

1 Alpha course hosted by a local church

1 New regular community meal called Regenerate

2 Paddle boarding days

2 Step Out of the Traffic courses

22 Day volunteers from local organisations

Lone Parent Fair

7 Local churches & organisations got involved

6 Pamperists

65 Volunteers

50+ Families attended





Highlight: throwing wet sponges at Racheal Peck!

Lone Parent Fair

The SMILE Lone Parent Fair is a free annual event. This year more than seven local churches and organisations supported the day through volunteering and funding costs. St James' Church Poole, kindly let us take over their grounds for the day.

Crafts, traditional stalls, entertainment, crèche, BBQ, planting, refreshments including lots of cake and more all add to the family fun! This year we held the first raffle and was hugely popular along with the Pamper Parlour.

The Fair, together with our SMILE Coffee Mornings are our most popular events. Our events need a lot of volunteers to help them run, particularly the Fair. If you are a hairdresser, nail artist, make-up advisor or a massage therapist, and would like to help at next year's event, we would love to hear from you.

Attendees

217 | 83 adults and 134 children came to the fair

Volunteers

65 | 65 adults from 7 churches & 6 businesses helped

Healthy Eating

93 | Portions of Cowboy Beans were cooked & eaten

House Plants

86 | House plants were potted & found a new home

Family Portraits

38 | Professional family photographs were taken





Peer to Peer Support

The support that parents provide each other, through their shared experience, is key to the **success of SMILE**. Nurturing enables the community to flourish as more families join the project.

Racheal explains: *"The peer to peer support is amazing and it's beautiful."*

The support happens quite naturally at our groups. There is a wealth of knowledge and experience amongst these Mums, knowledge that we don't have because we're not in their situations.

We want to continue facilitating our walking group,

board game cafe and community meals where the families come together regularly to build these relationships.

This enables our parents to see that others are facing similar challenges such as 'the teenage girl phase' so that coping strategies or practical advice can be shared. The Mums then grow in confidence and feel less isolated."

"...such a supportive, encouraging and validating group to help me find the strength and confidence to become the mother I am today." - SMILE Mum

From Lone Parenting to Mentoring

Two of our members of SMILE have a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) - where a child is unable to continue living with their birth parents and adoption is not a suitable option.

Those with an SGO are eligible for various forms of support. Through the SMILE Coffee group these parents support each other, sharing knowledge about financial support and ensuring they were both receiving what they were eligible for - including an affordable family holiday.

This one conversation has led to a new friendship, sourcing additional support and a well deserved getaway that didn't cost the earth!

SMILE Values

Our community is made up of many families of different ethnicities, life experience and backgrounds. This creates a diverse and vibrant place to be. It is great, but sometimes communication can be a challenge.

In response to this we talked with our community about what SMILE means to them as well as what they would like it to look like. Together we chose seven principles to underpin our community.

We recognise that none of us are the finished article and so we invite our members to journey with us to help keep our values at the centre of all we do.

One very talented Mum, designed our values poster which is now on display at all SMILE events.

"The SMILE Values are a safe place for me... The values are important for everyone to feel that SMILE events are a safe space for them to share how they're doing. And I love to see people lift one another up when someone's having a tough time and support one another." - SMILE Mum





The Great Outdoors

Here at SMILE we love connecting with nature. Parents are often shocked at how well their children behave for the whole day when venturing to outdoor spaces with us!

Our hope is that we can give our parents confidence to visit outdoor spaces on their own or with friends, providing great times and precious memories to look back on over the years.

“Outside events really couldn’t happen without volunteers and that’s where the magic happens!”
- Racheal Peck



15 volunteers regularly give their time to support SMILE

The Joy of Volunteering

Having volunteers supporting us, is invaluable to our families - the benefits include:

- Having other adult role models for the children to connect with.
- Children from larger families get to receive some extra, often needed attention.
- Volunteers give extra hands to those with multiple children and those with babies and toddlers, so that parents can spend quality time connecting with their older children.

“You make the world a better place, I have grown so much in confidence since I started volunteering.” - SMILE Volunteer





ReGENerate Community Meal

The ReGENerate Community Meal was launched in partnership with Poole Community Exchange and Parkstone United Reformed Church, who also host the event.

It includes refreshments, a homework club, crafts and messy play before a two course meal is shared together. Every session is varied but involves a lot of fun!

Many children with special educational needs attend - it is a real joy seeing the changes in the young people as they grow in confidence and learn new skills. One young girl, who has just started school, delights us with new words and songs she has learnt, before rushing off to the microphone for her favourite pastime of singing and dancing!



"Thank you for letting me make a mess, I mean doing my craft, it has really flicked a switch in me."

I walked in crushed by the world, got home feeling like I can cope again. Regenerate literally saves lives and sanity of which I'm in short supply." - SMILE Mum

The young people are always eager to help with clearing dishes and sweeping following the meals. They also take great delight in updating the SMILE team with their development such as the child who shares their progress with a difficult book. Or the girl who was excited to start school so she could join the homework table! We have found that meeting regularly creates special bonds among the group enabling it to truly develop into a community meal.





It's a Wrap Kids!

"The boys loved picking me a present each. They made me open them as soon as we got home" - SMILE Mum

This year we launched two events in partnership with St James' Church, Poole. Our Christmas Gift Wrap event provided the opportunity for Mums to join a Secret Santa style event with a difference!

Mums brought an item they no longer needed, to St James' Church, where they were then able to relax with other parents in the café. Supported by volunteers, the children then choose a gift from the donated presents, which they wrapped in paper they had lovingly decorated with stickers and drawings ready to surprise Mum.

The event was so popular that one of the Mums requested

this be repeated for Mother's Day, which we did, with the addition of children planting spring bulbs in hand decorated flower pots.

Around 25 SMILE families came to the events, supported by 8 volunteers at each session. Our Christmas and Mother's Day gift wrap experiences were created to ensure parents receive at least one surprise present, while also providing the opportunity for Mums to relax and their kids to be creative.

"We love partnering with SMILE... It is amazing to see first hand the support that they give to these families..."

It is great to see and to contribute to God's love being showered upon these families." - Revd Canon Lucy Holt, St James' Church, Poole





Thank You

Our SMILE community keeps growing and so do the blessings. We would like to say thank you to:

Three local churches who give financially - St Mary's Longfleet, St James', Poole and Longfleet Baptist. It has also been a pleasure to build relationships and find new ways to use church spaces to provide love and support to families.

Three local businesses who released 22 staff members to volunteer with us for a day including - Haskins, Nationwide, J.P. Morgan and Chase bank.

Three local churches who partnered with us to provide regular SMILE events - Longfleet Baptist for pilates, Poole Methodists for the Board Games cafe and Parkstone United Reformed Church and Poole Community Exchange for approaching us with your community meal for SMILE to test, which resulted in the ReGENerate being formed.

To our volunteers who give up time to connect and build friendships. To all the churches who support us - we look forward to working with you more in the future.

To all those who fund SMILE's work with special mention to St Mary's Fund Salisbury, the People's Health Trust, HSBC Community Support and J.P.Morgan and Chase bank. We would also like to thank all the regular individual donors.

To save the best until last: our SMILE members - you are what makes SMILE. It is a joy to know you all and to be a part of your children's lives. I am blessed to witness you all blossom.

Love Racheal

Racheal Peck - SMILE Lead

Become a friend of SMILE

We need regular donors to help us to:

- Reach those unseen families who are in crisis, suffering or feeling isolated.
- Provide the things that funding bids do not cover. Such as the purchase of a sports bra for a Mum who has started running, a coffee for when a parent needs a listening ear or a Bible for those asking the big questions.

Standing orders can be set up using the bank details below.



Bank: CAF Bank Account
Sort code: 40-52-40
Account number: 00035371
Alternatively scan the QR code to get started

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Alternatively a standing order and gift aid form can be downloaded from our website at:

faith-works.org.uk/get-involved/donate/ or you can contact the office by calling 01202 429037.

*SMILE is proud to be part
of the Faithworks' family of projects*

FAITHWORKS

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Charity no: 1108714 – Company no: 5077777

We believe that no one should be alone on their journey when life is hard.
Faithworks works alongside people, practically building hope and resilience.

We want every single person locally to be within 15 minutes of a place of welcome that
radiates life, community, and immediate help – exactly as SMILE does!

We run practical projects around food, finance, recovery, homelessness and lone parenting
in urban Dorset, collaborating with councils, other charities and local churches.
Find out more by clicking on the QR code below...



Our website



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facebook.com/SmileConnectLoneParentSupport



faith-works.org.uk/what-we-do/smile-lone-parent-families/

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