

Families Matter

Living Springs is a Family Centre, but family means so many different things to different people.

For some of us the word family will conjure up the picture of two loving parents with their two, maybe three children – thriving, happy, and well cared for.

However, for others this is not the case.

For some individuals we work with, it means a father who physically or sexually abuses his children and a mother too afraid to be able to protect them. Or maybe the mother is also an abuser.

It means parents who neglect their children, some perhaps because they have a learning disability, some because they are dependent on drugs and others because they just don't care.

It means parents who spend their time at the pub, drinking away the money,

regularly leaving small children home alone, or others who drink themselves into oblivion at home while the children have to become the carers.

Living Springs works not only with these parents, helping them towards better, safer, parenting, but also with the children whose lives have been shattered by the treatment they have suffered.

These children are isolated, often 'failing' in school; they dare not get too close to other children, due to the secrets they have to keep. Frequently misunderstood, their inability to concentrate can lead to bad behaviour and often exclusion.

At Living Springs we work with them on a one-to-one basis, in a secure place and with staff who really care about them.

Jane Chapman
February 2005

For Living Springs, 'family' can be a single mum or dad, a pregnant girl, abused youngsters, parents with learning disabilities, or a young couple struggling to cope with their children – but they are all part of God's family. And in His eyes 'all families matter'.



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The first 20 years

- an expanding picture

Moving in

The first big step in the fulfillment of the dream, it marked the start of an amazing journey.



Our first resident

We were full of excitement, wondering what it would be like, experiencing the apprehension and then the joy of meeting our first mum-to-be!



More space - more people

The family room gave us more space and the ability to develop our service. And over and above this was the coming together of volunteers to get the job done; the joy of people meeting people, of seeing new faces, willing hands and of receiving the blessings of others.



A houseful

Four mums and babies in the house kept us busy. Life was full of ups and downs, problems to overcome and lots of fun to be had too. There was joy for Jane being present at births when the girl's mom was not there, plus phone calls in the middle of the night, baby sitting for 4 babies, 28 bottles of baby milk per day, and agonizing over decisions as foster carers.

Supported housing

This has given us the opportunity not only of fulfilling the vision but also of being able to give families a chance to live and grow together with support from our staff and volunteers; seeing some of them going out better equipped for the challenges of fully independent living, but always ensuring a positive outcome for the child - whatever that may be.



Why we do what we do

To everyone at Living Springs

I have decided to write you all a letter of thanks as I will be leaving soon and I want you to know how much I have appreciated all the support and good advice you have given me, although at times I haven't been an angel, and have not agreed with some of the advice you have given me and ended up learning the hard way.

I feel that if it wasn't for you taking me in and supporting me and pointing me in the right direction then I wouldn't have been as happy and successful as I am now and I can't thank you enough for that.

I also want to say sorry for being a little bugger at times and testing the boundaries and bending the rules, but we all learn from our mistakes and, sure, there will be a few more to learn from...not as major as past ones though!

You have all been great and I will miss you all very much! I am a bit scared about leaving but I am also really excited to spread my wings and live properly independently.

Sandra and Annie

No words or gestures can ever express the special place we have in our hearts for all the love and care we have received from everyone at Living Springs.

Susan

Can you believe that a year has gone by already? I am still not quite over all that's happened, but am happy and my baby is happy...and shockingly, so is my family.

Also Natalie has been doing well despite her Downs Syndrome - in fact she is reaching all the stages that any child her age should be at, so we pray she continues on the same track.

So thanks again, and keep up the good work.

I think of you all, and every Christmas reminds me of Living Springs.

Yours,

Davina xxx



No matter how my time at Living Springs goes or the outcome for me and my baby, I want to thank you for your help and guidance along the way. You have got a really big heart.

Cheryl

Helping You

For some, family life can be tough, uncertain, and sometimes frightening. Young families especially face difficult and unexpected choices, often alone and without guidance. Living Springs comes alongside these vulnerable families, providing care and support at critical and life changing moments.

"I need some space"

The prospect of coping alone with pregnancy, birth and parenthood can be too much for some women – women who are vulnerable, affected by family conflict, or whose learning disabilities mean they need extra support.

Deciding to proceed with a pregnancy is often a brave choice, and at Living Springs we support women and young girls who have made that choice. Whether the plan is for mum and baby to return home or for the child to be adopted, we offer time and care to make the outcome the best it can be, for the mother and for the baby.

We also welcome mums and children at risk in their homes, supporting them until they can return home or move on.

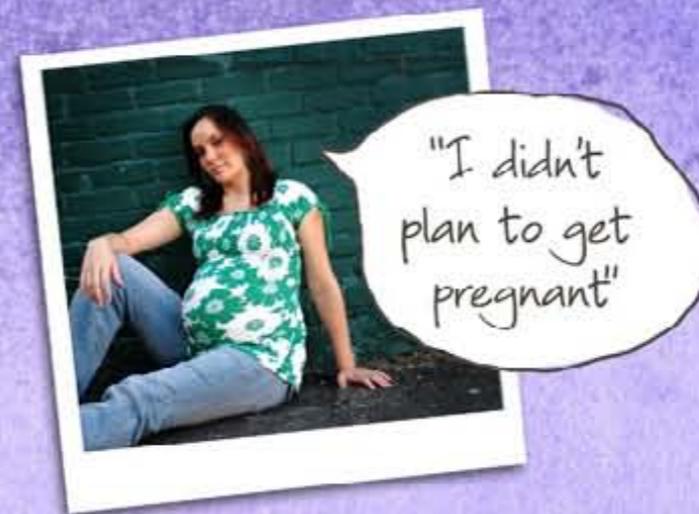
We can provide accommodation in our specially developed Barns Project – a safe place where mums to be and mums with youngsters can get the support, advice and help they need.



"We're not coping at home"

But the support doesn't end when families leave their accommodation. Those moving on into uncertain or fragile situations need continuing help, and that's what we provide – through home visits, parenting assessments and practical training sessions back at Living Springs.

And for families who haven't stayed in the Barns, but who are finding it difficult to cope with children or demanding situations, the same service is available. Mums and dads who feel isolated and who are trying to fend for themselves have somewhere to turn for real support.



An unplanned pregnancy raises all sorts of questions and fears. Living Springs' own pregnancy support service, located in Stourbridge High Street, offers confidential care – the chance to ask questions, have a free pregnancy test, get advice on contra-ception and sexual health and talk through the options.

We don't judge, we listen. There is no age limit, and everyone is treated with the same care and respect. Visitors can come on their own or with a friend or family member.

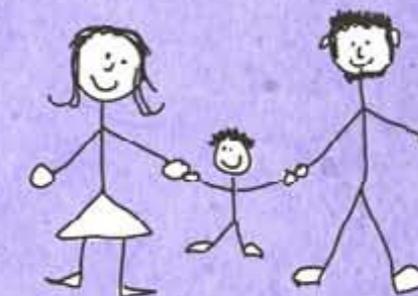
"One of the main causes and consequences of social exclusion is family breakdown and poor parenting" *

"We need time with the children"

Going through family legal proceedings is stressful for everyone concerned. Children especially need reassurance and some kind of 'normality' when things go wrong.

"Children's life chances are still strongly affected by the circumstances of their parents" *

Living Springs offers supported contact in an inexpensive venue, where families can come together in a neutral and non-threatening environment. Toys, books, kitchen facilities and a play area mean that families can spend time doing family things. Staff and volunteers are on hand to help where needed.



*From 'Breaking the Cycle – Taking stock of progress and priorities for the future'
Social Exclusion Unit