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Working together
to keep **families**
together

Welcome

As Chair of St Michael's Fellowship, it gives me enormous pleasure to introduce our recent work with disadvantaged families in London and south east England.

We have been working with parents and children since 1903 and, sadly, the need for our work is as urgent as ever.

Our approach is both protective and preventative. The work is complex but as you will read, dedicated and skilled staff, building on years of knowledge are able to transform lives, sometimes in the most unexpected circumstances.

We are especially proud that we can secure a safe and happy future for so many children, breaking intergenerational cycles of deprivation, abuse and underachievement, giving them the chance to live a socially engaged life and in time to care for their own children.

In 2015 we started a more formal training and partnership link with the world famous Centre

for Abuse & Trauma Studies at Middlesex University, having worked with them closely over several years. Our Outreach team, awarded a perfect score by commissioners, achieved the CANParent quality mark for its young parent programme .

We are working with many organisations locally and nationally, sharing what we learn, what works and how we can best ensure the safety and wellbeing of our most vulnerable children.

Thank you so much for supporting our work.

HH Crawford Lindsay QC, Chair



Our work



We work with disadvantaged families to improve their lives and futures and secure the best possible future for their children. The safeguarding and welfare of children is at the heart of everything we do.

Working with parents, we help them to become "the best parent I can be". We aim to break cycles of deprivation and underachievement and keep families together, where this is in the best interests of the child.

We undertake family assessments and support, and have an outreach service for teenage and young parents in Lambeth.



Protective work Residential Family Assessment and Support

Activities and Achievements

Residential family assessment and support has been a core service since 1991. We work with some of the most complex families in London and the south east.

Many parents were not nurtured as children and have no positive experience on which to build their own parenting. They may also have other issues in various combinations such as mental ill health, learning difficulties, substance misuse, domestic abuse, a childhood spent in care, poverty and no recourse to public funds.

During 2014-15 we worked with 60 families on behalf of local authorities and the courts, to assess parenting capabilities, to support parents to develop new skills and to recommend what is best for the child.

Our residential work is based on a three-stage approach; initially, staff observe parents and their children to establish the family's strengths and difficulties.

Intensive work follows, designed to reinforce competencies, encourage attachment, help parents understand their child's needs and reflect on past experiences and behaviours that have had an impact on their ability to care for their child.

Towards the end of the assessment, staff will draw back from interventions to see how well change is embedded and is likely to continue in the family home.

"Staff are honest, upfront and try to help you any way they can."

"Sessions are very helpful and I am more confident in opening up without the feeling of being judged."

Parent



"You were the only professionals brave enough to stick your neck out and make firm recommendations. Everybody else has sat on the fence. Thank you."

Guardian

During 2014–2015:

- We worked with 60 families and 78 children
- More than half of the children were three months or younger
- Families were referred to us from 24 local authorities
- 23 families returned home with their children
- The courts agreed with St Michael's Fellowship's recommendations in all cases.

Prior to St. Michael's Fellowship's intervention, a total of 43 children had already been removed from 23 families who stayed with us. Remarkably, eight of these families were able to return home with their subsequent children after support from St Michael's staff.

"I feel that I have bonded with this baby because staff support me. I wish I had them there with me when I had my older children."

Parent

The case for residential parenting assessments

Residential parenting assessments are intended to provide independent, robust, fair and evidence-based assessments for local authorities and the courts whilst keeping the child safe. When the risks are high or little is known about how parents function, or the parents' relationship, residential assessments mean the child can remain with the parent in relative safety.

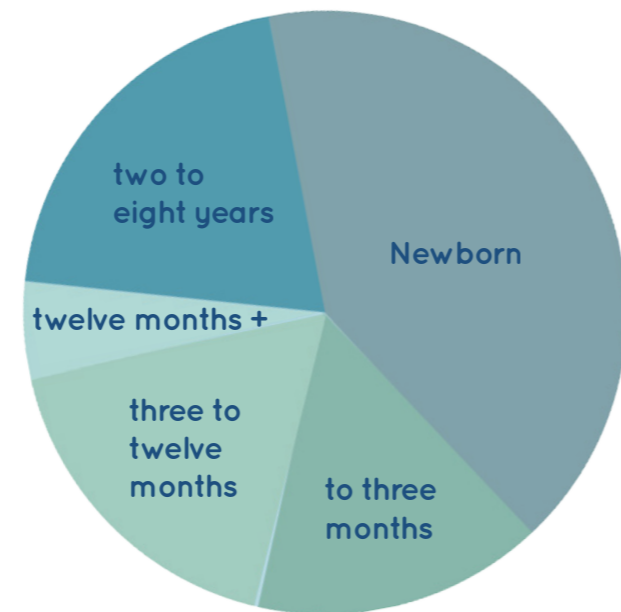
These intensive assessments also provide evidence of 'good enough' parenting or the lack of it in a relatively short time. This is important for all concerned, most critically the child. Early intervention offers the child the best possible chance in life.

Residential family assessments are an effective way to assist the court in making a decision that secures the best future for the child. Where this involves a young baby – more than half the children we worked with were three months or younger – the assessment is timely.

Where larger sibling groups come to us, it is often the case that children have languished in neglectful, abusive families. Residential assessment can highlight the experience of those children and offer a solution.

We don't prolong assessments where it is clear that the parent is unable to meet the child's needs and it is not in the child's best interests to continue.

Parents are actively involved in their assessments, adding comments to their daily recordings, taking part in their reviews, letting staff know their learning style so that information can be delivered in the most appropriate way. There are regular opportunities for them to evaluate their placement and highlight what they need. Parents help to change practice through the ideas shared in weekly meetings and parents are working with us to devise new services and tools to support families.



Ages of children we worked with

“We were impressed with St Michael’s ability to work with this family and maintain the focus on the children’s needs.”

They completed a full assessment of each child’s individual needs and the mother’s inability to meet those needs. We stand by their assessment.”

Social worker



Preventative work Outreach with Young Parents in Lambeth



*“the work is
extraordinarily
powerful”*
Ofsted

Activities and Achievements

Our outreach service has been working with young parents in Lambeth since 2000. Many were themselves poorly parented, lack positive adult role models, leave school with few or no qualifications, live in poor quality housing, and have poor physical and mental health. Over three quarters are affected by domestic violence.

We aim to break the cycle of deprivation for these parents and their children. We support young and teenage parents to make the transition from childhood to adulthood, to create stable and nurturing environments for their family, including finding housing, employment, mental health support, training and education opportunities, accessing health and antenatal services and providing practical parenting support and advice. We support them to become self-reliant and access universal health services, job centres and children’s centres.

Lambeth commissioners scored St. Michael’s Fellowship’s outreach team a perfect 50 out of 50



“I and my colleague took a full day to put the tree together which has taken up a whole wall at the Centre. It gave great pleasure to see the looks of the parents’ faces when they saw how it had come together. We also had members of staff taking time to come and admire our tree.

That tree is the highlight of my year.”

- Young Parent Practitioner

The Parenting Tree

The Parenting Tree was created during weekly sessions at our group for young parents at Effra Children’s Centre.

Parents looked at their lives based on a tree. The roots are what has influenced their parenting and made them the people and parents they are today. They listed prison life, social services, drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, single parent family, close family network, grandparents and aunts.

The trunk of the tree contains their names. The leaves represent how they want their children to be; words like clever, confident, kind, loving, caring, healthy and intelligent.

The branches show what they must do as parents to help their children be the people they want them to be; patient, tolerant, supportive, give hugs and cuddles, listen and be responsible.

Finally the fruits bear the names of their children. The children decorated the fruits in a crèche activity.

During 2014—2015

- We worked with 76 pregnant teenagers, 103 young mothers and 56 young fathers
- 29 young parents were awarded 49 AQA certificates in 15 different units – for some their first formal educational qualification
- 26 young parents moved to education, employment or training
- 14 obtained appropriate housing for them and their baby
- Eight children were removed from child protection plans—an estimated saving of some £4,000 per child.

The case for young parent outreach

Whilst many young parents are great at bringing up their family, Department of Health research tells us that for young parents generally infant mortality, rates of depression, isolation and long term poverty are all higher.

Young people in Lambeth are some of the most disadvantaged in London and the borough has an unenviable reputation for violence, in particular, violence against women and girls.

Focusing on this marginalised and stigmatised group, we aim to help young parents escape from a lifetime of poverty and social exclusion, and give their children the chance to thrive and achieve.

“St Michael’s Fellowship programmes strengthen parenting for vulnerable young parents and safeguard their children exceptionally well. The work is extraordinarily powerful in changing young men and women’s attitudes to gangs and offending; it improves their relationships and helps them to sustain the care of their children safely.”

- Ofsted

Teenage Domestic Violence

A quarter of the young mothers referred to us are said to be involved in violent relationships. Once staff have established trust, we find that the real incidence is more like three quarters. As well as practical help, our facilitated peer support group DiVa offers a lifeline to these young women.

“The DiVa group is very supportive and confidential so I feel comfortable sharing everything that has happened to me. It helps me learn about different forms of domestic abuse and how abusive relationships can impact on children.”

- Mother

Our work with young fathers

We have employed two male workers to support young fathers since 2007.

Contrary to media portrayal, young fatherhood is often a catalyst for young men to seek work to provide for their family and we do our utmost to help them make the change. Our young fathers’ practitioners tailor their support to the individual young man. Issues may include domestic violence, offending, gang involvement, mental health and substance misuse and poverty.

We have a contact service for separated fathers to remain in contact with their child, where it is safe to do so. During the year, five fathers started seeing their children again.

“Because of this group I am able to see my daughter again. She was only weeks old when I last saw her, she’s now two years old. We are getting to know each other again. It’s so wonderful, thank you.”

- Young Father

We have run a pilot of an evidence based programme Caring Dads to encourage fathers who are or have been in violent relationships to consider the impact on their child, and develop a more empathic parenting style. Working with young fathers means we can protect the child from a younger age, and makes behavioural change more likely. This small pilot has been successful so we will continue this programme.



Measuring Impact



Our work is intended to have an immediate impact on parents and children. We also want to influence policy and practice concerning parents with complex issues. We believe we have unique insights, garnered over many years supporting these families and working alongside different organisations. These insights can help other practitioners in related fields of education, health and social care, and

can help policy makers shape coherent strategies that deliver sustainable change.

In our work, we track evidence of parents' self-awareness, intention to change behaviour and actual behavioural change in a variety of ways. Residential assessments require us to collect evidence that is robust, fair and where necessary will stand up to lengthy cross-examination in court. In our

outreach work, we may collect hard data – attendance at groups and job clubs, for example, how a child meets their developmental milestones. We will note the number of children who have been removed from child protection measures and the number of parents moving into education, training or work. We may ask the crèche or children's centre about changes in a child's behaviour and we will consult with other practitioners where relevant. Staff working with parents one to one will visit the home several times. We also ask parents to report on their own behaviour and where appropriate their partners' behaviour pre and post the programme. These questions track increase in self-confidence, social and communication skills. Parents are also encouraged to tell their own stories, in words, video, images and music.

These measurements are part of our reporting to our funders and our annual or final project reporting. We belong to a network of voluntary and community sector agencies in Lambeth to share best practice

and to influence local policy. We are also a member of Children England, and use national networks to share learning with colleagues around the country.

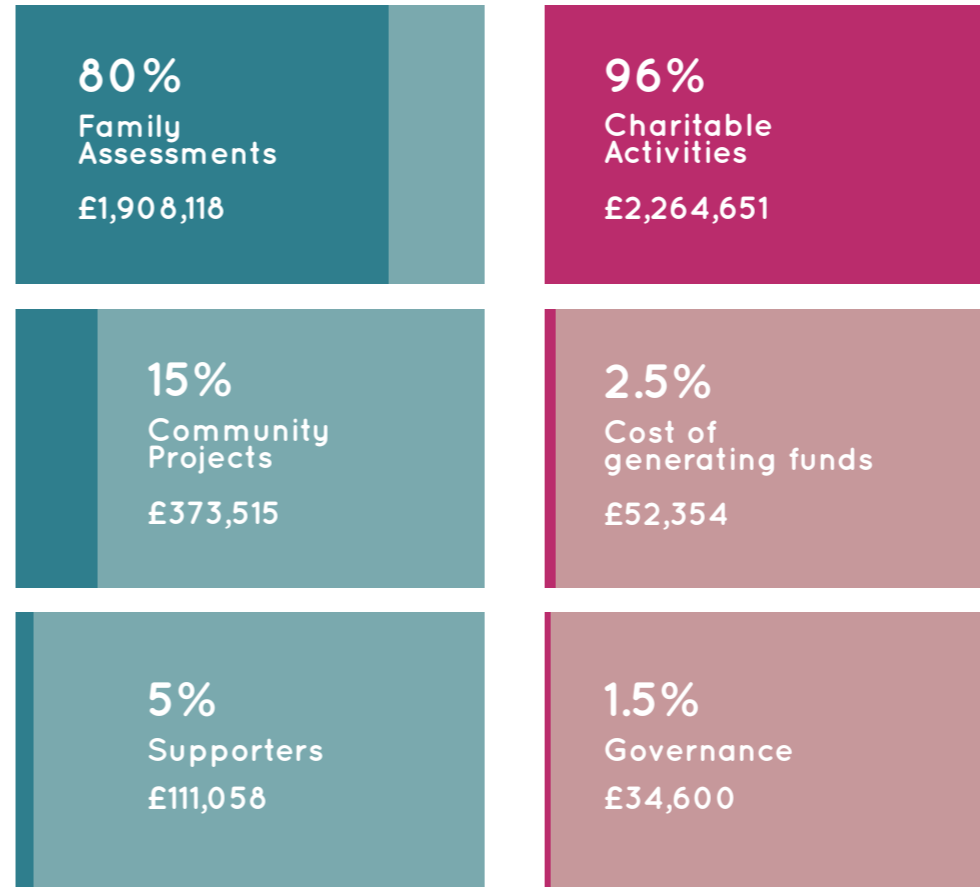
Our approach is underpinned by international research around parenting and child development. Our academic evaluation partner is Middlesex University.

Officers at the Ministry of Justice are working with us to interrogate historical data and data going forward from our residential assessments more comprehensively.

“There are fathers out there twice my age that can't do the things that I have learned”

- Caring Dad Participant

Where our money comes from, and how we spend it



- 96p out of every £1 is spent on delivering frontline activities
- Our income from supporters nearly quadrupled
- We will continue to increase supporter income, in real terms, and as a percentage of our income

The Future



As a regional charity with national networks but limited means, we are working hard to influence how we as a society work with families who are some of the most stigmatised in the country. We share what we learn and partner with other organisations with common goals.

We want to extend the support we offer to families, to sustain our very promising Caring Dads programme with young fathers, and to offer support to mothers leaving residential assessment without their child. Currently there is very little, often resulting in a cycle of repeat pregnancies followed by care proceedings for child after child.

We need your help to do this and we are most grateful for your support.

Sue Pettigrew, Director



How to support us

We all want a society where children are valued, protected and able to succeed regardless of their background. If you would like to help us ensure a bright future for children, whatever their history, please support our work.

Donations

Donate by bank transfer to St Michael's Fellowship:
Nat West Clapham Common Branch, 145 Clapham High Street,
London SW4 7SN

Account No. 82008329 Sort Code 60 05 34

You can also make a donation or set up a direct debit from our website or post your cheque payable to St Michael's Fellowship.

A gift in your will

If you'd like to find out more about leaving a gift in your will, please contact us for more information.

St Michael's Fellowship will not pass on your details to any other organisation.

If you would like to be kept informed about our work, sign up to our e-newsletter at www.stmichaelsfellowship.org.uk, and follow us on Twitter @stmfellows.



“Staff are highly aspirational and tenaciously endeavour to empower parents enabling them to maximise their potential.”

-Ofsted



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