

Mothers' Union helping families in need.

Many of you may have heard, perhaps a long time ago, about the Christian charity Mothers' Union. Some of you may think it doesn't exist any longer, but you would be wrong. Founded in the UK over 140 years ago, there are now over 4 million members across the world. One of our aims is to support families who are in any kind of trouble.

I thought you might like to learn about some of the projects Mothers' Union carries out both here in the UK and around the world, so from time to time, I will be putting an article into this parish magazine.

In this first article I want to tell you about our biggest project across the UK. It is called AFIA, which stands for Away From It All. The project provides holidays or day trips out for families who have not been able to go away for some years (perhaps never). In 2019, the last year in which we have figures because of Covid, all the Mothers' Union members in the Oxford Diocese (that's Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire) worked together to send 9 families on holiday: 16 adults and 31 children in all.

And I'd like to tell you a little bit about two of those families. The stories are true but to protect their privacy I'm not using their real names:

Stephanie has four children. They had to leave their home in 2016 and spent almost a year in a Women's Refuge. Then they were able to move into a new home in Oxfordshire which was lovely but it meant the children had to change schools and make new friends twice in the year. After they moved, Stephanie had to have an operation which meant she could not drive for a while and then one of her boys had both his legs in plaster too. After they recovered, MU gave them a holiday at the seaside. Stephanie wrote us a letter to say thank you. She wrote:

'Dear Mothers' Union, Thank you for our lovely holiday. The children most liked splashing in the swimming pool. The food was lovely and we are very grateful. Thank you, Steph and all my children.'

John and Louise have three small boys. They have had lots of family problems. Life for the parents is very stressful and since the boys were born they have never had enough money to go on holiday. We gave them a weeks' holiday by the sea. Louise said it was so nice to be able to relax away from the daily chores and they all came home feeling much happier.

For many families, having a holiday or even just a day trip out is the biggest expense and most of us would feel really disappointed if we could not go away at least once a year. With the current 'cost of living' crisis, there will be even more families who can't afford to go away. In 2019, Mothers' Union in the Oxford Diocese spent over £14,000 on AFIA holidays. During Covid, it hasn't been possible to send anyone on holiday but we are recommencing the programme now. We have already agreed to give another 3 families a holiday and hope to at least equal the numbers from 2019. Along with all the Mothers' Union members across the Oxford Diocese, we will be working hard to raise enough money to do that.

What is really nice is that we can see the immediate benefit that each family gains from having that time away together.

If you know someone who would benefit from time away, please get in touch with me. There is an application form which must be sponsored by a member of the clergy, a doctor, health visitor or social worker.