

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. As you will have seen from the paper included in your bundle and the contents of the envelope on your seat the Chichester Diocesan Association for Family Support Work wants to bring to an end the secrecy that surrounds our work. We have almost forgotten how to share the good news of the work we do and we need to share with you the future role we can play in nurturing and caring for families that are struggling to thrive across the Diocese. Working to deliver projects serving the common good.

FSW has come a long way in its lifetime, from starting out rescuing those fallen women as a Penitentiary Society through many changes to reflect the ever-changing socioeconomic picture of Sussex. In that journey we have played a role in the development of services that we now collectively refer to as social work, long before the state became involved.

Since the early 1980s we have had qualified Social Workers working with families that struggle, originally as a preventive service, we now deal with far more cases that are complex, we do not do single-issue interventions and I hope we never will because our experience says the presenting issue is often result of a much deeper challenge. Our service is a holistic approach that engages each family member, so that together with a Family Support Practitioner the family develops their own solution, time consuming but effective. For many of our families this approach results in them taking ownership of their action plan and working in partnership with the Practitioner. FSW's role is to listen, reflect, advise and guide.

In today's context of blended families, the need for some individuals in a family to have the support of a trusted "friend" is essential. The complexity of the family make up can sometimes result in isolation from extended family and hostility, or exclusion within a community. Coupled with challenges such as mental health problems, poor housing, additional educational needs and low paid employment there is little wonder that families struggle. Did you know a single parent on the National Living Wage is £74 a week short of the minimum income needed, and a working couple with two children are £49 a week short of the income needed. Explaining why our own food bank sent out around 2000 food boxes over the last year.

At the heart of every family are children. Although our work often is with the adults we never lose our focus on children, we never forget that whatever is happening to them in their early lives it is something they have little or no control over.

We have set out a brave ambition to see FSW return to having at least one Practitioner in every Deanery across the Diocese. Recognising that many individuals are weary of faith-based organisations, as we move forward, we want to break down those barriers.

In Rustington, we have been working with families from the local estate. None of the families from this area attended church nor the activities for families that they ran. Our Practitioner got to know the families and is now supporting 30 families. These families now make use of the church toddler group, some go to messy Church, and the brave ones go to Church now having discovered that actually Christians are quite nice really!

But not all of it is as simple as Rustington. One of the families we have worked with was very complex and the Statutory Social Worker told our Practitioner that if we were not able to support the family the only option would be to go through the legal process of taking the children into care. This family was one of the most violent cases of abuse that we have dealt with. Dad was removed from the marital home after the eldest daughter reported him for beating mum, then the sons took on the role of abusers. Mum stuck it out with our support alongside Social Services. During the first year mum requested that three of the children be taken into care because she could not cope. Sadly the three daughters were placed into care a few months later. However, there is still a relationship between mum and her children and one day mum may be strong enough for the children to come home. A sad but positive outcome, as mum showed her real strengths in caring for her children and surrendering them voluntarily into care. In addition, we saved the state about £750,000 in that period in both legal and care fees for not needing to take full court action. Therefore, as we move forward our work has a benefit to the wider community and not just the family.

FSW is working to develop new partnerships, we are re-engaging with statutory family services looking at ways we can work alongside them to support families. We are starting to work with the Diocesan Education team more closely and work jointly with the Worthing refugee project, AirS, CAP, Fagan's and many other local charities in Sussex.

What is the church's role in all of this? 100 years ago, we did the work with families, not the state. 70 years ago, we started to hand to the state the roles we had filled. In 2019, East Sussex County Council are proposing a legal minimum services budget – it is time that we as a

Church work together again to ensure that the needs of families across the Diocese are met.

In his sermon at our annual Eucharist, the Bishop of Horsham said “FSW, I believe, represents the ‘diaconal arm’ of Chichester Diocese - that part which embodies service to individuals in need. Insofar as any organisation can represent or embody the life of the Church, FSW represents that social engagement which prevents our proclamation and our liturgy from becoming sheer hypocrisy. FSW represents that service to people which incarnates our faith and the Messianic Mission, which we share, with the one into whom we were baptised.”

That is not only high praise for FSW as an organisation but even more so a great challenge set for us. For FSW to be a diaconal arm of the Diocese we as an organisation have a tremendous amount of work before us. We have to ensure that our services are not just available in the current 11 Deaneries but we must be available in time to every Parish. We have to ensure that we not only generate the income for today, but we have sufficient to keep us going through tomorrow and well into the future. This is a service that cannot stop and start.

Speaking on behalf of the trustees and staff today I know this is a challenge they are happy to rise to if you want us to. In return, we would ask you to walk with us both as a Diocese and as individuals in your parishes and deaneries; to support us in prayer; with food and toys; with time and energy and of course with money. Because together I really do believe we can serve the common good across our diocese working to FSW’s goal of seeing every child in Sussex supported by a strong and loving family and also show the world that this family of faith is alive and there for everyone who needs us or wants to join with us. Thank you.