

# engage

## Single Parent Fair

How to run a special event for the single parent families in your church or local community



# Introduction

This event is designed to help you reach out into the community, and to have maximum impact among single parent families. The event could be held once a year for 2-4 hours on a Saturday morning; it is exclusive to single parent families and *everything is free*.

It is a time for parents to access practical advice and information on a wide range of issues, and to enjoy special treats they might not normally afford. And it's a time for their children to have fun taking part in supervised activities.

## Aims of the event:

- To establish contact with single parent families in the church, and those in the local community who would not normally come to church.
- To offer support and encouragement in a practical way on the day, possibly leading to ongoing support through monthly coffee mornings and/or setting up a local support group.
- To make single parents feel valued both as individuals and as parents.
- To share the love of God in practical ways.

## Planning for the event

For this event to run successfully, it requires:

- the backing and support of the church leadership.
- a realistic budget.
- many willing volunteers to help, plan and run the event.
- planning well in advance.

### Do your research

- **Practical Advice** – Look for local organisations which would be of benefit to single parents and invite them to come along, on a voluntary basis, with exhibition stands promoting their services. Most agencies are pleased to have an opportunity to reach many single parents at one time. There may be people in the church, too, who can offer free expertise on subjects such as money, benefits or housing.
- **Treats** – Members of the congregation may have skills in simple beauty treatments such as nail painting, hair braiding or foot massage - ask for volunteers. Local beauticians may be willing to offer their services free providing they can advertise their services. Ask if a local hairdresser would be willing to give dry haircuts (you will probably have to pay them for their time),

## Date and Time

- Choose your date and time well in advance, ensuring it doesn't clash with any other major events in the area. Remember this is only a half day event.
- Avoid having the fair during or near holidays such as half-term.
- Check that the members of your team of volunteers are available on the chosen date.

## Venue

Be realistic about the amount of space and help available. You will need separate areas for the exhibition stands, beauty areas, children's activities and refreshments. It is worth considering having the exhibition in the church, and beauty and children's activities in the church hall. Think carefully how you are going to set up. It is a good idea to have the advice tables separate from the beauty and coffee areas.

## Team

Volunteers – You will need many volunteers to help with this event. There are all sorts of jobs for all sorts of people – some jobs will require specific skills while others just need willing hands and a welcoming face.

Meet with the team beforehand, to enthuse them, to plan the event and the layout of the venue, also to discuss what their tasks will be before, during and after the event.

# Exhibitors/Organisations

Invite exhibitors such as

- Income Support
- Job Centre Plus
- Lone Parent Advisor
- Surestart
- Local Children's nurseries
- Local schools
- Children's centres
- Cruse Bereavement Care
- Child Support Agency
- Local single parent support groups
- Homestart
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Other local advice points
- Local Housing Aid
- Credit Action
- Neighbourhood projects
- Financial Advisers
- Inland Revenue/Tax office
- Local college with information of courses and childcare available
- Locally based drug and alcohol prevention units
- Local healthy living centre
- Family solicitor with information about making a will

Other non-local organisations, which may send a representative or information if someone is not available, are:

- **Care for the Family**  
Tel: 029 2081 0800 Web: [www.careforthefamily.org.uk](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk)
- **Divorce Recovery Workshops**  
Tel: 07000 781889 Web: [www.drw.org.uk](http://www.drw.org.uk)
- **Parentline Plus**  
Tel: 020 7284 5500 Web: [www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)
- **One Parent Families**  
Tel: 020 7428 5400 Web: [www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk](http://www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk)
- **Single Parent Action Network**  
Tel: 0117 951 4231 Web: [www.spanuk.org.uk](http://www.spanuk.org.uk)
- **Families Need Fathers**  
Tel: 08707 607111 Web: [www.fnf.org.uk](http://www.fnf.org.uk)

It is worth noting that people who come in from outside agencies to help with the event are often really impressed by what you are doing. Events like these increase the Church's profile in the community in a positive way.

## Publicity

Good quality publicity is essential

**Flyers and posters** – Ensure that these contain accurate information and a contact phone number for more information. Choose a particular design and use it for all your publicity materials – for name badges, thank you cards and banners, as well as flyers and posters. It helps to identify your church, and will be recognised and remembered should this become an annual event. Promote through the local schools, nurseries, doctors' surgeries, health visitors, and word of mouth.

**Local papers** - Contact the local newspapers asking them to promote your event, or you could write a short article about the event and ask them to publish it. Invite someone from the local press to do a story and take pictures on the day.

**Radio** – Local radio stations are always looking out for stories concerning local events. Ask if they could publicise it – or, better still, ask if you or someone could be interviewed about it. Do choose an interviewee who is really enthusiastic about the event.

**Council or community websites** often have space for promoting community events.

**Banner** - Prepare a good quality banner with information about the fair to display outside the church in the weeks leading up to the event.

**Personal invitations** – The personal touch is very important.

# Budget

Knowing your budget helps you plan. To help, we have produced a sample budget for a Single Parent Fair. These are approximate basic costs; remember this all depends on how much you want to spend.

## An example of an outline budget:

### Advertising

100 Posters	£65.00
5,000 invitation cards	£113.00
Banner (one-off payment)	£100.00
TOTAL	£278.00

### Decorations

(Tablecloths, serviettes, cups, helium hire, balloons etc)	£135.00
<b>Stationery &amp; postage:</b>	£25.00
<b>Gifts for parents/children/gift bags:</b>	£75.00
<b>Payment of two hairdressers @£60 each</b>	£120.00
<b>Children's craft activities</b>	£20.00
TOTAL	£653.00

This budget is based on a Single Parent Fair catering for approximately 100 visitors on the day.

# Sundry items

Tables covered with paper or fabric tablecloths for the exhibitors' displays.  
Helium-filled balloons to give to the families or to use to brighten the displays.  
Name badges for the exhibitors (it makes them appear more approachable).  
Items to put in the gift bags given to the parents on arrival.  
Registration cards (make available to be completed on arrival; it will help you keep in touch with the families).

# Planning for the treats section

**Beauty treatments** are something which single parents rarely have the time or money for, so this will be very popular. Consider having a booking system or voucher which they should present to book a time.

- Hairdressers. They might offer free haircuts, but you may have to pay them a flat fee of around £60 for the event (based on their time and salon charge of 3 x cut & blow dry at approx. £20 each)].

- Beauticians to give facials, foot massage, eyelash dying, brow waxing etc. (Choose those who fit in with your church ethos). [You may need to pay for this service unless a volunteer is able to provide this service].
- Nail painters. This can be done by church members. You may have to buy the nail polish.
- Family photographer. Happy, relaxed family group photos can be posted on to the families by an assistant who takes details of names and addresses. Any negatives or digital images should be destroyed or deleted. **(Do not use for church purposes without the families' written consent.)** The photographer could be a church member who has an interest in photography.

### Good quality, clean, nearly new clothes.

You may wish to consider, for the first hour, using a voucher system given to families on entry. (This prevents the first families taking all the best clothes.) For example, one voucher equals five items of clothing. Half way through the event they can return and help themselves to more

### Children

Play area/activities for the children depending on the ages, the space available and the helpers you have

- CRB checks - the children's workers must be Criminal Record Bureau checked (Perhaps the church's children's leaders may be asked, especially if they are already CRB checked)
- Have registration cards for the parents to complete, giving any specific information that needs to be known about a child's health, such as asthma.
- The children must be signed in and out by the same person! A good signing-in system is vital as there may be disputed custody issues for some of the children.
- Depending on available space, have a separate room for the crèche (under 4s)

### Security

Depending on the area you are working in, it may be appropriate to have stewards on the door. They will prevent children escaping without their parents, and keep others out.

### First aid

Have someone with an up to date first aid certificate in attendance in case of accidents. Or invite someone from the Red Cross or St John Ambulance to attend on the day (you may need to give them a donation)

### Refreshments

Arrange in advance who will be baking cakes and who will be serving the refreshments. Providing free tea/coffee/squash and homemade cakes, and serving them at tables with tablecloths, makes parents feel that people have gone to a lot of effort just for them.

### Dads

Remember there are single dads too! Think about having something for dads, such as darts or snooker, in an area where they can meet other dads. (Have some male volunteers available to chat to the dads. Remember they will be greatly outnumbered by the women) Do offer

them free haircuts too. Ask what things they would find helpful. Consider having some leaflets available in the room with practical tips on topics such as cooking/ recipes/ bringing up daughters etc.

### Further suggestions

- Mums' craft room – provide card making, for example This is an excellent place for mums to open up and talk.
- Dads' chill-out room - coffee and papers, snooker, darts, kite making and other crafts for them to do; or ideas of what to make with their children.
- Consider outside help (this may have to be paid for!) such as circus skills. juggling/ plate spinning; or a puppet show, drawing workshop, pottery making, etc.
- Art and crafts/ balloon modelling for all ages.
- Hair braiding and face painting.
- Play Station in a room for the older boys.
- Nails and jewellery-making for the older girls.
- Outside – a bouncy castle; inexpensive entertainment if space and weather permit.

## On the day

### Setting up

Most of your setting up and preparation will need to be done the night before, so you are ready when the exhibitors arrive. Make sure your team is assembled early and know what their tasks are for the day. Each exhibitor or organisation will need a table for their resources. Covering it with a cloth and attaching helium-filled balloons says to the parents that someone cares enough about them to add those special touches. A name badge for each representative makes them appear more friendly and approachable. Ensure that everything is set up before the doors are opened to the families.

### When the families arrive

It is good to have a designated 'welcomer' at the door as people arrive.

Provide registration cards to be filled in by the parents on arrival, so you can keep in touch in the future.

Give each parent a gift bag. The bag might contain some of the following:

- Hand cream or face pack, bar of chocolate, sweets for the children. (Remember to provide suitable gift bags for the dads).
- A bookmark with list of useful phone numbers, such as the Job Centre and the Department of Works and Pensions.
- 'Why we do it' information with service times and promotions for anything else the church provides such as other activities for single parents or children's activities in church.

## Engaging with the families

While their children are being looked after, the parents have time to wander round the exhibitors' area for advice and information, to enjoy the beauty treatments, and to have some time to themselves. You will want to have some volunteers available to chat and get to know to the parents over coffee.

# After the event

- A thank you note to the organisations and volunteers makes them feel it was worth their time coming, and may encourage them to come to future events.
- Have a team debrief to discuss what could be improved on, or changed, for next year.
- Be assured that what you have done has really helped the parents - probably more than you can imagine.

# What next?

Consider how you will follow up the contacts made on the day. You could invite them to a Christmas carol service, organise a Christmas party, or think about providing Christmas hampers or a small gift for the families who attended.

What are you hoping will come from this event? Perhaps you are looking for more contact with single parents in your community. If so, you may wish to consider some of the following ideas:

- A monthly coffee morning with activities for the children.
- A local support group meeting weekly/fortnightly.
- A subsidised holiday or weekend away as a group.
- A Sunday lunch together with activities planned for the afternoon (Sunday is one of the loneliest days for a single parent family).
- Practical support, such as having someone available to help/ demonstrate/ do basic maintenance checks on the parents' cars.
- Basic DIY tips or a working group from church to work alongside a single parent who may not have the necessary skills to decorate, change a fuse/plug/tap washer etc. (Do ensure the people giving the tips/skills have up to date knowledge and are qualified for the part.)
- Offering a babysitting service so the parents can come to a church event.
- Providing transport to get the families to church.
- Inviting a single parent, whose children are with the other parent for Christmas, to spend Christmas Day with a church family.
- Organising a New Year's Eve party – children and transport included. Christmas and New Year can be extremely lonely times for single parents.

**The possibilities are endless!**

# For more information

Contact those who have successfully run a Single Parent Fair

## **Kath Lynch**

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# Resources available from Care for the Family

## **Single Parent Family – for anyone who parents alone**

'Single Parent Family' - regular email newsletter

Pen Pal scheme

Take a Break activity breaks for single parents and their children (aged 5-16)

Books, and web based resources.

[www.careforthefamily.org.uk/spf](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/spf)

## **A Start-Up Guide**

For those considering setting up a local support group for single parents.

## **A Different Journey – for those widowed at a young age**

Regular email newsletter

Day and weekend events

Telephone support network

Web based resources

[www.careforthefamily.org.uk/adj](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/adj)

For more information on the above or other parenting and family resources. contact

Care for the Family

Tel: (028) 2081 0800

Web: [www.careforthefamily.org.uk](http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk)

This paper was written by Care for the Family with information provided by Holy Trinity Church Cheltenham, The Petra Fellowship Brimscombe, and Holy Trinity Church Aylesbury.