

MU Away From It All Holidays (AFIA): Quality time together for stressed families

April 2007

AFIA holidays are a practical and important way that the Mothers' Union helps to support and enrich family life. Each year the MU offers on average 550 families a holiday through the AFIA scheme, enabling over 850 adults and 1200 children to get away for a break in the UK.

Why holidays?

Approximately a third of the UK population does not have a holiday each year. The most commonly given reasons for this are low-income, ill-health and work commitments.

Whilst parents often recognise the importance of holidays for strengthening family relationships and for relief from daily stresses, understandably, they are often the first thing to be sacrificed in low-income families or families with ill-health.

For those people experiencing emotional stress or financial hardship, a holiday allows them to have a much-needed break, giving them the opportunity to relax as a family.

The holidays offered through the AFIA scheme take many different forms and are tailored to ensure that families are offered the most beneficial for them. The following are just some of the holidays available.

MU family holiday weeks

Family activity holidays involve MU volunteers taking a number of families away together to provide friendship, entertainment, a variety of activities and support during the holiday. The team of volunteers, often supported by a chaplain, are ready to share fellowship with the families, allowing holidaymakers the space to reflect on their own personal faith journey.

Recently a single mother from Salisbury with 6 children ranging in age from 4-16 who had never been able to take her family on a proper holiday went on an AFIA weeklong break. All the family enthusiastically joined in the activities that were on offer and were able to

unwind and enjoy themselves. The mother was absolutely delighted and said,

"We have had a really tough year and it just made such a difference to us all. The children have not stopped talking about it."



Caravan and campsite holidays

The MU tries to ensure that, where possible, holidays offered are close to a beach, with facilities to amuse adults and children alike.

For two single mums and their children in Aberdeen and Orkney diocese, being selected for an AFIA holiday was a truly wonderful, life-changing experience. With stories of abuse, violence, depression and lacking in confidence and self-esteem, the sisters could not understand why the MU members were willing to care, share, listen and give.

The family went to a camp/caravan complex on the Edinburgh coast and were able to enjoy all of its facilities including a swimming pool, play areas, kids clubs and evening entertainment. As the mothers wrote:

"We had a fantastic time, it was good to be all together – thank you so much..."

Short breaks

Not all families are able to take longer holidays due to work, financial commitments or for health reasons.

In these instances the Mothers' Union is often able to offer short breaks and long weekends.

In Lichfield diocese, a mother who was undergoing chemotherapy was able to go away with her husband and two children to Lego Land, Windsor for a fun weekend. This was extremely beneficial for all of the family, especially the children.

The response from the family was:

"A wonderful family holiday came at the right time for all of us following a very difficult year. This strengthened us to go on. From the bottom of our hearts thank you so much."

Day trips

From safari parks, beach outings, trips to national parks, farms and theme parks, the Mothers' Union is able to offer families the opportunity to have a fun day out together, building shared and happy memories they can treasure for years to come.



In July of last year the MU was able to help towards the cost of a day out to the beach for 16 families who were staying in a resettlement hostel for battered women and their families.

As their support worker commented:

"These families are still very vulnerable when they leave the hostel and usually unable to afford days out because of all the expense involved in setting up their new homes."

On their return the Mothers' Union received a card that read,

"Thank you to the lovely ladies at the Mothers' Union for making our trip very enjoyable."

Words of thanks

Many of those who go on an AFIA holiday get in touch with us afterwards to share how the holiday helped them and their families. Here are just a few of the things they said:

"This has given my confidence a boost and the future seems more positive. The children are still bubbling with excitement about their experiences."

"My Mum had been feeling very low and depressed – the holiday saved her. Thank you to all the MU ladies for making it possible."

How to apply

The scheme is open to anyone who is under stress. People can apply directly to the MU diocesan AFIA Contact, or if they do not have contact details, they can write to the Action and Outreach Unit at Mary Sumner House, who will forward the letter on to the appropriate diocese. Each application needs the support of a professional referring agent, such as a head teacher, GP, social worker or a member of the clergy.

Each diocese has a team of Mothers' Union members who organise the holidays. They will normally help with part of the cost of a holiday or with travel expenses. In some cases they are able to pay the whole cost but diocesan funds are often limited.

How to get involved

Volunteer your time: For details of how to get involved, please contact your diocesan Action and Outreach Co-ordinator or staff at Mary Sumner House.

Donate: By making a donation to the Britain and Ireland Development Fund you can make a real difference to the lives of families.

Prayer: By praying you join a worldwide network of Christians constantly upholding our work, and the people we support, in prayer.