

Caring for spouses and children of international students

Introduction:

- A significant number of international students bring their partners - wives or husbands - and children to this country especially if their study course will take several years e.g. studying for a PhD.
- We will mainly focus on wives since they represent the majority of student spouses, but it's good to remember that for some couples it is the wife who is studying and the husband might be caring for children and/or working in order to support her (and possibly also following a course of study themselves!).

Characteristics of spouses and their children

- May be struggling with English
- May be lonely – feeling isolated at home caring for children
- Often unfamiliar with UK culture, and miss out on the University welcome / familiarisation events
- Lack the contact with other internationals or locals which their spouse may enjoy at the university
- Handling stress within the marriage as both partners cope with culture shock
- Adjusting to raising the children and housekeeping without the support of the wider family (or servants!)
- School-aged children may be struggling with language, very different school life, making friends...

Activities for spouses and children could include:

- **Family-friendly outings and social events** (see below)
- **Hospitality** - try to link families with local families who have children of similar age
- **Women's groups** (preferably with a welcome for pre-school children)
- **Parent and toddlers** groups

Setting up a women's group (or any kind of group)

1. **Gather team** – Christian women preferably with experience overseas or with internationals, people who like befriending others!
2. **Pray and research** – What groups are running already? Where are the families staying?
3. **Decide on venue:** consider -
 - Location: bus routes, proximity to student housing, parking, ease of access with buggies etc,
 - Type of building: church hall, university premises, someone's home...
 - Room: size, proximity to a kitchen, space for pre-school children to play
4. **Decide on suitable time and day:** consider –
 - A lunch time meeting? Morning coffee? Afternoon tea?
 - School pick-up times

5. **Agree on your aim(s):** don't assume that everyone is thinking along the same lines as you! Being explicit at this stage can save problems and misunderstandings later on.

6. **Advertising:**

- Homemade cards
- Local print shops
- www.vistaprint.co.uk provides high-quality cards for you to add your own wording at reasonable cost. They also do inexpensive banners.
- *With permission* try placing in public libraries, Asian shops, university libraries, counselling centres, medical centres, English language schools, University International Society, Chaplaincies, churches, mosques...
- Word of mouth is probably most effective! e.g. sharing a card at the school gate with another international mum

Ideas for a women's group programme

- UK festivals of all kinds e.g. Easter, Christmas, Harvest, Guy Fawkes, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Lent etc.
- Weddings across the world
- Baking/cooking British food e.g. pancakes for Shrove Tuesday, shortbread, hot cross buns, soups, smoothies, bread....
- Crafts e.g. making greetings cards, calligraphy, flower arranging
- Navigating the health care system, First Aid, keeping healthy...
- Understanding the school system e.g. how to register a child
- Visits to local parks, public library, museums, cathedrals, etc.
- Offer a women's Bible Study either on a different day or as part of the programme: "Women in the Bible" could be your first series.

Social events for all the family

- Christmas parties, Light parties (alternative to Halloween)
- Outings to castles, gardens, parks etc. which have children's play areas
- Visit a beach - flying kites, beach games, picnics....
- BBQ's or picnics

Child Protection issues:

- We need to take this seriously: take note of your own church CP policy or use Friends International CP policy
- This is particularly relevant if the children are being cared for in a separate room to their parents.
- Contact Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS) for more information.
www.ccpas.co.uk Tel 0845 120 4550

Risk assessments

- Essential for outings, but worth doing also for your regular meeting place
- Forms are available from Friends International – these are simple to fill in and don't take as long as you might think.

Food

- Be aware of food allergies: e.g. label food which contain nuts
- Always provide a vegetarian option
- Consider providing Halal meat for any Muslims present

Finally

- Name badges are a must! (sticky labels, or more permanent ones)