

With three young children at home, Allison and Dan weren't able to go on overseas missions trips or volunteer for many of the service projects at their church. But, they wanted to serve their own community in some way, and when they heard about Bethany's Safe Families for Children (SFFC) ministry, they knew they could help.

Since they signed up to volunteer as a host family, they have welcomed 9 children into their home for short periods of time. Their second hosting, a 5-year-old boy, stayed a week when his mother fled a domestic violence situation and needed someone to take her son while she resettled. Allison talked with the mom everyday and forged a relationship that they still nurture today.

"We really don't have anything in common," Allison said, "except that we are both mothers." And in that one commonality, these women share so much. Allison and her family are able to be a resource for this mother on an ongoing basis, just as the Safe Families for Children ministry intended. "So many of these mothers are desperate," Allison shared. "It's hard to imagine having no one to turn to for help even in the midst of a crisis."

Allison and Dan's church family have rallied around them as caretakers and around the entire SFFC outreach. During the couple's first hosting, the church community provided meals, Walmart gift cards, and diapers. Volunteers signed up to serve in numerous roles, coming alongside Allison and Dan's family and the families requesting help from the SFFC network.

Life doesn't typically provide extra time or space, but Allison has found that when she opens her home to children in need, God provides the resources necessary to make it all work. "When these kids arrive at my house, I get an extra measure of grace. Sometimes when I just have my three, I can't imagine that I could add another one, but when that child shows up, God makes it work. I've had to learn to surrender, to let go. I've had to realize that it doesn't really matter if my house gets a little messy or things get a little crazy. It's not about me. It's about caring for these vulnerable children and their parents."



## Safe Families for Children

Bethany Christian Services is a Christian, nonprofit organization that serves children and families on five continents. Bethany was first established in 1944 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and has more than 120 offices across the United States.

Bethany's Safe Families for Children is provided in partnership with the Safe Families for Children Alliance, [www.safe-families.org](http://www.safe-families.org). Since 2003, SFFC has facilitated over 20,000 hosting arrangements.

[www.safe-families.org](http://www.safe-families.org)

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## Safe Families for Children

**A national movement and regional partnership between Bethany Christian Services and local churches.**

### FAMILIES HELPING FAMILIES



Safe Families for Children (SFFC) extends community support by hosting vulnerable children and strengthening their families in crisis through a network of volunteers motivated by compassion. The SFFC movement is based on the perspective that the safety/health of our community children is the responsibility of each one of us and that parents are the key to providing long-term safe environments for their children.

## FAMILIES HELPING FAMILIES

When a crisis strikes, many of us rely on relatives or friends for support, but some families do not have a safety net. Challenges such as postpartum depression or unemployment can hit suddenly and be debilitating. Without adequate support, research tells us that the risk of neglect or abuse significantly increases.

Parents and pregnant teenagers do not have to be alone. God designed the Church to be His hands, feet, and voice in our neighborhoods and around the world. Safe Families for Children connects churches to families in the community who are going through a crisis, often alone with limited resources. SFFC is a network of devoted volunteers, motivated by compassion and a commitment to keeping children safe and ultimately together with their families.

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Parents are able to access an extended family-like support from the church consisting of:

**Host Families** who practice Biblical hospitality by making room in their homes for children or pregnant women needing a temporary, safe, and loving place to live.

**Family Friends** who come alongside parents to support them in making necessary changes in their lives.

**Resource Friends** who provide assistance to parents and other SFFC volunteers through offering services such as transportation, child-care, meals, clothing, baby supplies, furniture, and professional services such as dentistry, carpentry, or hairstyling.

**Family Coaches** who facilitate communication and relationship building between the host family and the family requesting support.

## HOW DOES SFFC WORK?

Referrals to SFFC come from a variety of sources, including schools, hospitals, social service providers, and churches. Parents and pregnant women can also call us directly for help. Our family coaches work quickly to assess the needs and contact an available host family.



Volunteer host families agree to the hosting arrangement at their own discretion and can put a time limit on their involvement. The average length of stay for a child is about 5 weeks, but can range from two days to a year. Host families are screened and approved through background checks, home studies, and training. And, they serve without compensation. SFFC is not foster care. Parents maintain custody and contact with their children.

SFFC is dedicated to stabilization, family support, and child abuse prevention. In 2013, 91% of all children in a SFFC hosting arrangement returned home to their family and less than 2% were screened into state custody.

If you are interested in learning more about SFFC, please contact us through the information on the back of this brochure.

