

FUN, LOVE AND LAUGHTER IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

The range of needs of the children visiting the farm is vast, no two weeks are the same. One week they may have a boisterous group of 20 children from a deprived area escaping their inner-city lives surrounded by drugs and violence, the next 12 children may have complex medical needs, sensory impairments and educational needs and can't access mainstream leisure facilities because of physical or behavioural challenges.

This could be followed by a group of 16 Young Carers who live very grown up lives, helping to perform domestic duties, personal care or provide emotional support for a parent or sibling, resulting in social isolation and a lack of social skills. All too often, they also support children who are victims of neglect or abuse who need to feel safe, valued and loved.

Holidays for these children are absolutely vital, they provide respite

from daily routines and environments, widening horizons and exposing the children to new people, places and attitudes. Holidays provide them with memories they can draw on when times are hard, giving them the emotional strength to deal with difficult situations. They promote a positive attitude in children who have limited educational and leisure opportunities due to their disabilities or social issues.



A WORLD OF CARING CAN MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

At CAFT I met a lady whose family is a perfect example of why the charity's work is so vital. Suzanne and husband Chris have 4 children, but from the 20 week scan of their fourth child it was clear that something wasn't right, and Sarah was born with complex cardiac difficulties and has spent much of her young life in and out of Alder Hey hospital, undergoing open heart surgery several times. In the weeks following her birth, Suzanne stayed with Sarah at Alder Hey, much to the confusion of her other young children who couldn't understand why Mum wasn't home to tuck them in at night. Throughout all this time Chris drove to Liverpool every day whilst trying to keep life as 'normal' as possible for their other children.

One of them had to be available to take Sarah for the numerous hospital appointments, so they have had to cope on one income, and have exhausted their savings and re-mortgaged their home. Having a very sick child means the whole family is on a constant emotional roller coaster, but they shielded their family and friends from the reality saying "Yes,

she is doing well; yes we are coping fine' but inside wanted to yell, 'No she is not doing fine, and we aren't coping and we are too scared to plan anything in advance because we don't even know if Sarah is going to make it.'"

In 2016 they faced their toughest time when they were told that the surgery they needed to keep Sarah alive was no longer possible. It was then that one of Suzanne's colleagues contacted CAFT, and just before Christmas they received a phone call with "words that will stay in my heart forever, 'We want you to come and spend a weekend with us because we want to look after you.' For the first time Chris and I felt that we didn't have to face this on our own. We didn't have to pretend, we could be honest about our fears and we had a group of people who were there not just for Sarah but for all of us, and it felt amazing. The weekend we spent at CAFT was fantastic, giving me and my family far more than anything money could buy. It gave us laughter and magical memories. It gave us precious time together as a family without having

to think about anything other than enjoying ourselves and it gave us support and friendship when we were going through our most frightening times."

Based at the beautiful Booth Bank Farm in the heart of the Cheshire countryside, CAFT provides a variety of programmes for terminally ill, disabled and disadvantaged children from all over the North West, and is a lifeline to children who are in desperate need. They pride themselves in bringing a little light and fun into the lives of children who have known terrible hardships at such an early age. In 2018 the charity aims to help in the region of 3,000 children; to do this they must raise £1million. ●



To find out more about their work and how you could get involved visit their website: www.caft.co.uk or call 01565 830053