



**DEFEND^{THE}
FATHERLESS**

2023

IN REVIEW

Mission:

To be one more reason for families to say “Yes!” to the fatherless through foster care and adoption by helping to meet the families’ physical, financial, educational, spiritual, and emotional needs.

History:

In 2016, The York County Foster Closet was launched under the York County Foster Parent Association to help meet the physical needs of local foster and adoptive families by providing children’s clothing, baby equipment, furniture, etc. out of a temperature-controlled storage unit that was configured as a boutique.

As the need for broadened services was recognized, Defend the Fatherless officially launched in August 2019 as a 501(c)(3) organization. For the first six years Defend the Fatherless operated The York County Foster Closet out of two 10x20’ storage units. In February of 2022 the organization moved into a more permanent, stand alone space in the Flint Hill Baptist School House. This move led to tremendous growth and the ability to meet the needs of the families they serve in greater ways.

The year of 2023 continued with a growth trajectory as the organization broadened their reach to a larger number of foster families as well as kinship and family preservation families. The relationship with the Department of Social Services was strengthened and Defend the Fatherless saw an increase in visits to the York County Foster Closet from social workers. At times, Connection Events were so highly sought after that for the first time ever, a wait list had to be implemented. In addition, Defend the Fatherless, was able to support a full time executive director as well as a full time Program Manager/Volunteer Coordinator. The organization grew their board of directors to a total of eleven members, all possessing a unique talent or skill set to bring to the organization. With the introduction of the new board members, and the decision of Defend the Fatherless to join the 1.27 National Network of nonprofits who are working in the space of vulnerable children, Defend has gained knowledge in a multitude of areas which will continue to support the growth and health of the organization as a whole.

Please visit the Defend the Fatherless website to meet their Board of Directors and learn more about this growing ministry: www.defendthefatherless.org.

2023 Program Updates:

Adoption Grant:

- January 2023: Defend the Fatherless funded their fourth annual Marybeth Robinson Adoption Grants. **Two grants** were provided totaling **\$5,000**.
- October 2023 - November 2023: Defend accepted Adoption Grant applications for the 4nd Annual Marybeth Robinson Adoption Grant. The grant recipient(s) will be announced on Jan 1st 2024.

Mental Health Scholarship:

- March 2022 Defend the Fatherless began offering a Mental Health Scholarship with the goal of reducing the financial burden of seeking trauma based counseling. Over the year of 2023, Defend provided **\$5,855 in Mental Health Scholarships to fifteen families**. This is an increase from \$4,800 in 2022.

Connection Events & Respite Events:

Connection and respite continue to be a huge need for the families Defend the Fatherless serves. The family structure of the foster and adoptive family is unique and it is important for the families served by Defend the Fatherless to feel a sense of community and belonging. Defend is proud to report that they hosted at least one connection event per month in 2023 and served over **1,250 adults and children** through their strategically developed programming which is a tremendous increase from 600 adults and children served in 2022.

January 2023: Defend the Fatherless hosted a **playdate** at the Defend the Fatherless building. Defend also hosted a live **Q&A session with a DSS worker** and allowed current foster families to ask questions and gain knowledge regarding foster care policies.

February 2023: In honor of Valentine's Day, Defend hosted their second annual **Respite Night** which was hosted at and sponsored by Forest Hill Church, Fort Mill. Respite type events allow caregivers to have some time away while their children are cared for in a safe, trauma-informed environment. During this event, each child was given a brand new Lego set and was paired 1:1 with a teen volunteer for the evening. The volunteer helped the child with their Lego set, assisted with dinner and guided them to watch a movie. Fifty two children attended this event which was an increase from thirty children in 2022. This event drew in 67 volunteers who were able to first hand see

the impact that Defend is able to have on the entire foster family unit through a respite event.

Also in February, Defend commenced their **weekly bible study** group which met every Tuesday through November 2023. This group was led by a volunteer from Flint Hill Baptist Church and was attended weekly by an average of ten ladies. Women grew in their spiritual connection with one-another and their relationship with Christ as they consistently attended these meetings.

Defend began hosting **monthly coffee meet ups** at the Defend Building in February of 2023. These casual gatherings proved to be a time for moms and their young children to gather and share conversation sometimes involving foster care and sometimes just about life in general. The little ones enjoyed playing with the toys and books that the Defend gathering space offers and the moms appreciated a chance to shop at the York County Foster Closet and take home a frozen meal when they left.

March 2023: Defend the Fatherless hosted a **Q&A session** with a local **school resource officer**. This event was well attended both in person and virtually and provided a time of education for parents of older children regarding trends in social media, violence and drug use among our youth.

Also in March Defend hosted a **volunteer appreciation night** for their **“Emergency Responder Team”**. This group of ten ladies who attended the event are always “on call” to pick up donations, meet families after hours or help sort the multitude of items that Defend receives on a weekly basis. This organization could not survive without the critical “Emergency Responder Team”.

April 2023: Defend the Fatherless hosted the Second Annual **Family Camp** at The YMCA Camp Cherokee. This day was filled with fun for foster and adoptive families. The families were given the opportunity to participate in a multitude of activities including a zip line, rock wall, crafts and water sports. Both lunch and dinner was provided as well as a story from our special guest and sponsor, Mr. Jim from the “Stories with Mr. Jim” podcast. This was a time of connection within family units as well as across like minded families. This event served 74 adults and 59 children in comparison to 2022 where 45 adults and 70 children were served.

May 2023: Defend the Fatherless hosted a **Mom’s Night Out** event at Therapy Resource Group entitled, “Painting without Boundaries”. Dinner was served then the mom’s participated in a short time of learning regarding setting personal boundaries and then they had time to get their creative juices flowing through a painting activity. This event

was well attended by fourteen moms who thoroughly enjoyed this evening away to share time with like-minded moms.

June 2023: In June the weather was heating up and kids were getting restless as they were home for the summer. Defend sponsored a connection time at **The York County Museum**. Families enjoyed exploring the museum and then enjoyed an outdoor picnic before heading home. This event was attended by 13 adults and 25 children.

July 2023: Defend the Fatherless heard the request from the general foster care community that parents need more time for respite care. Through their church partnership with Ebenezer ARP, Defend hosted their second **Respite Event** of the year. This event was put on by the Youth during their mission camp week and was attended by 18 children.

Again, through a response to the request for more respite care, Defend changed their annual Back 2 School Bash from a family event to a **Respite Event**. This event was hosted at and sponsored by Elevation Church- Riverwalk. Children were able to participate in a Princess Party where they were pampered head to toe with manicure and pedicure, hair styling and all things princess or a Superhero party complete with creating a personalized cape. The older children or those who were not up for a princess or superhero transformation were able to go to a Fun Zone filled with games, crafts and outdoor time in a bounce house. Fifty eight children attended this event and feedback from parents was that after a long summer at home, they enjoyed this time away to recharge.

August 2023: Sometimes teens are hard to engage and we never want the teens that are in foster care to feel left out of our programming. In August Defend came up with a strategy to get their teens moving. They hosted an event for children in middle and high school at **Adventure Air Trampoline Park** and let each participant bring a friend. Success! Friends and trampolines proved to be the key as Defend welcomed 33 teenagers and nine caregivers to this fun filled evening.

September 2023: October 2022: Defend hosted an **outdoor playdate** on a beautiful fall morning at the Flint Hill Baptist Schoolhouse.

In addition, Defend was able to secure tickets at a discounted rate to a **Narnia Production** at the Children's Theater in Charlotte and sponsored 30 people to attend this live production. The organization received tremendous feedback from families that they enjoyed this experience and it was something that if not sponsored by Defend their family would not have been able to attend such an event.

October 2023: Defend hosted an outdoor gathering at **Pretty Hippies Farm and Rescue** in Rock Hill, SC. Lunch was provided and families enjoyed the experience of a hay ride, interacting with rescued animals, pony rides and even bottle feeding newborn

calves. This proved to be one of Defend's largest events with 58 adults and 77 children in attendance.

November 2023: Every mom needs a little break as the end of the year rolls in. In November we sponsored a **mom's night out Taco Tuesday** event at a local restaurant. Fourteen foster and adoptive moms enjoyed conversation that only those walking this unique journey would understand.

December 2023. Defend's **Santa's Helper Program** concluded this year with a party at Elevation Church, Riverwalk. Families enjoyed time with Santa Claus, crafts, a chef prepared breakfast, coffee bounce houses and even a petting zoo. This was a beautifully run event and allowed families to truly get into the Christmas spirit while bonding with each other as well as with other like minded families. There were 67 adults and 101 children in attendance at this event which was growth from last year with 61 adults and 80 children.

Spiritual Growth:

- Defend the Fatherless continues to participate in a **weekly prayer call** where organizations and individuals across the state of South Carolina who are passionate about the cause of the fatherless meet to pray for specific needs.
- In September 2022, Defend the Fatherless began hosting a **weekly bible study** for foster and adoptive moms. This study continued weekly throughout 2023 and was led by one of Flint Hill Baptist Church's members. Women grew in their spiritual connection with one-another and their relationship with Christ as they consistently attended these meetings.

The York County Foster Care Closet:

- In 2023 Defend the Fatherless had **467 visits** to the York County Foster Closet, up from **192 visits in 2022**. The Foster Closet subsequently served **787 children** which is a tremendous increase from **328 children served in 2022**. During a visit to the York County Foster Closet, families are able to "shop" at no cost for items including: diapers, wipes, clothing, shoes, socks, underwear, car seats, baby equipment and other essentials. Defend continued in 2023 to strengthen their relationship with the York County Department of Social Services and served an increased number of families through DSS's Family Preservation and Kinship units.

- In September 2023 with the recognition that many families were needing beds to accommodate specific placements ex: siblings sets, infants, toddlers to small bedroom configurations, Defend launched a **Beds for Kids In Care** program. A small grant was secured to help support this new program and in just four months **43 beds** were provided as another way for families to continue to say, “Yes” to some of the most vulnerable members of our community.
- Through the **York County Foster Closet Swap Page** Defend regularly connects foster families to various donors for items that are not typically stocked at The York County Foster Closet, but that donors wish to give to families.

Frozen Meal Program:

- Through generous individual and group support, Defend the Fatherless was able to give away **409 frozen meals** this year which is an increase from **243 meals in 2022**. The frozen meal program continues to be a great way to get various community groups involved in serving.

Back-To-School Support:

- In July 2023 with a partnership from LifePointe Church Defend the Fatherless collected **125 pairs** of specifically wished for shoes through their **Back 2 School Shoe Drive**. This is in comparison to the **65 pairs** of shoes supplied during **2022’s** Back 2 School Collection. Children were able to wish for the exact pair of shoes they wanted and donors shopped for the wish. The week before school started, families came to the Defend Building to pick up their shoes and a backpack filled with school supplies and during that time had the opportunity to “shop” at the York County Foster Closet for some new clothing. The mom’s enjoyed grabbing a Frozen Meal to help ease some of the burden of cooking during a busy first week of school.

Santa’s Helpers:

- October through December 2023: Defend the Fatherless, for the fourth year, partnered directly with the York County Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide **Christmas to every York County child in foster care**. This year, **194 children** were served which is up from 184 children in 2022. Over \$10,000 was raised through the on-line Santa’s Helper campaign, 17 local churches and businesses hosted physical angel trees that helped to collect gift cards and funding for the program and through this joint community effort, \$40,000 was collected to fund the program in just three short weeks! The gift cards collected

were given directly to local foster families to allow them the joy of shopping for the foster children in their care and provide a connection opportunity between foster child and foster parent!

Vision for the future:

- In January 2024 we will fund our eight and ninth Adoption Grants totaling \$5,000.
- We will meet the needs of a minimum of 70 children per month at the York County Foster Closet by having the funding and donations to adequately supply the closet.
- We will serve greater than 1,000 parents, children and siblings through regular community building connection and respite events.
- We will provide a minimum of 5 beds per month to foster families in need through our new Beds for Kids in Need Program
- We will increase the mental health scholarship to \$1000 per family to accommodate the rising costs of mental health services

We believe that foster and adoptive families will thrive when fully supported. This organization can not continue to support the families we serve without the generosity of our community through prayer, volunteerism, business and church partnerships as well as financial and in-kind donations. We are truly grateful for our local community and beyond who continue to believe in the mission and vision of Defend the Fatherless. To God be the Glory!