

'Children in Greater Manchester face double-whammy of deprivation and poor schools'.

Sadly this issue is something that is all too familiar with the six Home-Start family support charities across Greater Manchester.

Decades of surviving poverty, poor mental and physical health and lack of family support are just some of the issues that have helped pave the way for the latest generation of children to face a challenging future in our region.

It was highlighted in the recent MEN article that Greater Manchester is an area where children are held back by a lack of confidence, uncertainty and low expectation.

It's something that Home-Start staff and volunteers are addressing every day of the week in the homes of local families. 'School Readiness' is an area of support that Home-Start is passionate about. We believe that supporting children to be school ready starts way back in utero and that a child's very early experiences, especially their relationships with their main care givers, is crucial in building resilient children able to reach their full potential at school and into adulthood. When a child is not 'School Ready', (cannot socialise with peers, is not able to express their needs and be independent, hold a knife and fork, go to the toilet on their own, or dress themselves), then their very early school experiences are blighted.

Our volunteers are enabling parents to make their child's very early experiences positive ones, in order for them to flourish and achieve as they continue their school journey into secondary education.

However, in a climate of funding cuts and withdrawal of front line services, many families that need support are falling through the gap; parents and children that are being failed.... In the case of Home-Start who provide volunteers to offer emotional and practical support to families, we know that if we had more volunteers, we could reach out to even more children who need us.

We welcome the Children's Commissioner's call for greater investment for struggling families and hope that this translates into investment for charities like Home-Start who have been working with such families for decades.

To find out more about our work or how you can volunteer for us, please visit www.gmhomestarts.org.uk