

It may seem strange thinking about the new school term just as children are breaking up for the holidays, but many parents across Greater Manchester, will already be feeling the anxiety of their four year olds starting school in September. Sometimes this is simply about missing their little ones, or not knowing what they will do with themselves all day. But for other parents, it's much more serious than that.

High on the Government agenda, is the issue of so many young children not being 'school ready'. Worryingly, schools are reporting an increase in the amount of children who are entering the classroom not toilet trained, who are starting school in nappies, who are unable to hold a knife and fork and who cannot socialise properly. This is compounded further by the fact that many children are coming to school having not had a good night's sleep and who are not adequately dressed and haven't been fed properly. All these things affect a small child's ability to cope and do well at school.

All seven of our Greater Manchester Home-Starts work with parents who, for whatever reason- poverty, poor mental health, depression, learning disabilities- are not meeting the basic needs of their children in their pre-school life. We are sending volunteers into families own homes to address these issues before they spiral out of control. Some of our volunteers will support parents in educating children through play, reading, and encouraging socialising and skills in sharing with others. Volunteers will also take in books to homes that do not have any, offer budgeting and healthy eating advice so that parents are better equipped to feed their children properly, and offer guidance on routines and boundaries. So many readers will not be aware of the amount of children who are not 'school ready'. But in communities across Greater Manchester, it's a huge, sometimes hidden problem. A problem that is going to have a devastating impact on generations to come, if we do not do more to get our under- fives better prepared for what should be the most exciting and rewarding times of their lives.

Our volunteers are making a simple, but effective difference to the lives of young children this Summer, but we desperately need more. All seven of our Home-Starts will be running training courses this year, if you have parenting experience, and can spare just 2-3 hours each week, to help a local family, please do get in touch. www.gmhonestarts.org.uk
