

Home-Start- supporting dads

For decades people have assumed that Home-Start is a charity that only supports mums. Whilst the overwhelming majority of families our volunteers do support are mums, increasingly over the last few years we are seeing more dads turning to Home-Start for support.

There are many reasons for this. The traditional family unit is changing; more mums are returning to work and their careers, with their partners opting to become stay at home dads. There is also an increase in dads becoming sole carers for their children.

One dad supported by Home-Start said: “After my partner walked out, I was literally left holding the baby. Talk about in at the deep end. For years I had managed a successful IT company, but here I was at home and I didn’t have a clue what do to with this tiny bundle.

The sadness was immense as was the anger at my partner leaving. I struggled to talk to my family and friends as I didn’t want them to think that I wasn’t coping. Looking back I really cannot tell you how I got through each day, no routine, no structure, I didn’t leave the house for days, I stared out the window wishing I was back at work and in control of my life again. And then I’d look at my tiny daughter sleeping in her cot, and feel so guilty for having those feelings.

I am not ashamed to say this; my mental health really began to suffer. I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t eat, all I could see was years of chaos stretching out in front of me. When my daughter was six months old, I finally plucked up the courage to go to the Doctors. I had it in my head that I needed to be okay by the time she got to her first Birthday. I was adamant that I didn’t want pills I just needed someone to talk to.

My Doctor referred me to Home-Start. I remember thinking at the time, are you mad? You want me to let a stranger into my house, some do-gooder? What Home-Start sent me was a lifeline. They sent me John. John's wife had died in childbirth and so John had raised his son completely on his own. He knew exactly how I was feeling, he talked, he listened and he never judged me. John showed me that a dad can raise his child on his own, a dad can take his child to the park, to swimming, to play group. Once a week, I'd see John walking down my driveway and this huge sense of relief would wash over me. I didn't just get a volunteer, I got a lifelong friend, he's a bit of a hero to me and my little girl, Gracie, who adores him. Gracie is now 2, and John still visits.

I have managed to go back to work part time, slowly but surely we are getting there, I can honestly say that's because of Home-Start and John. I cannot imagine a time when he won't be part of our lives. What this whole experience has taught me is that sometime life throws you off track, but with help, support and a charity like Home-Start, you can get right back on."

If you feel that you could make a difference like John has, please do get in touch with Home-Start. There are seven supporting families across Greater Manchester, and very soon a limited Home-Start service will also be operating in Wigan. Find out more about volunteering for Home-Start here- www.gmhomestarts.org.uk