

Reaching out to combat isolation...

Over the last three decades, Home-Start in Greater Manchester has adapted and changed to meet the needs of changing communities along with the issues and problems that parents face. Now more than ever we see ourselves supporting families with increasing levels of poverty and child deprivation, poor mental health and poor housing, to name but a few.

However, what has not changed over the last thirty years is parents telling us that they feel lonely and isolated. The UK is no longer a place where families live next door to each other; offering a network of support to new parents. Families are now much more dispersed, moving away for work and to live in cities that are more affordable with better housing... This leaves new parents with tough choices to make.

More than half of our families cite isolation as one of the reasons why they need Home-Start support. To know that once a week for just a few hours, they will have some adult company, emotional support and someone to listen to them, can be all they need. For other parents, our volunteers help to empower them to leave the house, make links in the local community and involve their children in activities.

One mum said: "Having a partner who works away is tough. I know he does it for the right reasons, to provide for his family, but the down side to that, is that for most of the week I literally have no one to talk to, share my worries with and offload on. But that all changed when I was referred to Home-Start by my GP. My volunteer makes such a difference to my week. I look forward to her every visit and store up all the things I want to tell her! It's not rocket science, but it really works. Adult to adult company, it's something we all need, no matter how much we love our kids!"

Isolation and loneliness is not just something that our supported parents struggle with. Many of our volunteers have told us over the years that they too felt lonely before Home-Start. They may be retired or have children that have moved away, whatever the reason, they often say they needed something to fill their time with, and volunteering for Home-Start has often provided them with that.

One such volunteer said: "Before Home-Start, I would clock-watch. The days just seemed to get longer and longer. I started to feel depressed and wondered what my purpose was. Becoming a volunteer for Home-Start was the best decision I ever made. It increased my feelings of self-worth ten-fold, when you hear a parent telling you how much they look forward to your visit, it gives you a boost all week long."

So, Home-Start really does benefit all, from the families who need help to the volunteers who support them.

To find out more about our work and the six Home-Starts across Greater Manchester, please visit www.gmhomestarts.org.uk

