

Thousands of children across Greater Manchester fail to see dentist

It was shocking to read that thousands of children across Greater Manchester are failing to see a dentist. In Manchester alone, it's believed this figure is more 40,000 children.

The figures also show that more than 20,000 children in Salford and 15,000 children in Rochdale have not seen a dentist in the last 12 months.

Only 64% of children in Manchester saw a dentist in the 12 months (up to June 2018); what makes these figures more shocking is that dental care for children is free.

In order to understand the reasons behind why this is happening, we have to have an insight into why these figures are as high as they are.

In Home-Start's experience, we have found that many hard-to-reach parents are not deliberately choosing to dis-engage with services. For many parents they are experiencing complex needs- poor mental health, lack of support networks, they may not have English as a first language, all these things can contribute to a parent not having the confidence to take their child to a dentist.

We do recognise the importance of dental care with young children (amongst other things), that's why our volunteers work hard to support parents in accessing services in their local communities. Our volunteers offer confidential and non-judgemental support, each week for just a few hours in local family's homes. Because of this unique, tailor-made support, families do, over time, confide in their volunteers about their worries and concerns.

It's not just the practical support of taking a child to a dentist that a Home-Start volunteer can help with, our volunteers also encourage parents to think about healthy food and snacks. Again, encouragement in a non-confrontational way, our volunteers never tell a parent how to parent their child, they simply offer advice and guidance.

Home-Start support takes an early intervention approach- supporting parents right from the start, rather than waiting until a family's issues have spiralled out of control, when they may need more costly intervention services.

Each of our six Home-Starts working right across Greater Manchester, train new volunteers throughout the year. Volunteers take part in this training before they are matched to their first family. Our volunteers come in all shapes and sizes- men, women, young, retired, and from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

If you are interested in finding out more about volunteering, please visit www.gmhomestarts.org.uk and find the Home-Start closest to you.