

## **'Thousands of children in Greater Manchester are starting school unable to speak in full sentences or use the toilet'**

We were concerned to read the Manchester Evening News' article that highlighted the fact that 12,000 children across Greater Manchester were starting school not 'school ready'. Young children who cannot use a toilet, are unable to speak a full sentence and cannot hold a knife and fork.

'School Readiness' is something that the seven Home-Start charities across Greater Manchester have been supporting local families with for many years now. Whilst it's a huge issue, understanding the reasons why some parents are unable to support their children at the start of their school journey is really important. Home-Start works with families who are struggling to cope, regardless of the reasons. Poor mental health, illness and disability, poverty and lack of support networks to name but a few. Coping with such issues, can often have a detrimental effect on parents, when life is hard, looking after a child can be hard too.

But, there is support out there. Our volunteers offer practical and emotional non-judgemental support to local families, crucially inside the families' own homes. Regarding 'School Readiness', our volunteers encourage early learning through reading, messy play, and developing language skills. With parents who are struggling, volunteers offer support with boundaries, routines, managing behaviour and socialisation skills- crucial for young children to get off to the best possible start in life.

One mum supported by Home-Start said: "I was suffering from really severe Postnatal depression with my baby. To make matters worse, my eldest child was about to start school. I worried about it all summer, I knew I should be changing his bedtime routine, I should be spending more one to one time with him- more reading, writing, helping him to tie his shoelaces that type of thing. But all I could do was worry about it and then cry. My GP referred me to Home-Start and my first thoughts were just please help with my four year old! Jill, my volunteer was a retired nursery nurse, and when I shared my concerns with her, she just smiled and rolled up her sleeves. Over the summer she gave my son so much attention, patience and one to one time, but importantly helped me to get him into a proper routine too. When September arrived, my little boy could count, spell his name and loved reading books. I was so proud of him and knew he was getting off to school life on track, so much of that was down to Home-Start and Jill."

The figures are stark, it's something that Home-Start is keen to address, we could do this with more volunteers. If you're reading this piece, and you have parenting skills and could spare just a couple of hours each week, we'd love to hear from you. To find out more about our work and how you can help, please visit [www.gmhomestarts.org.uk](http://www.gmhomestarts.org.uk)