

## **How volunteering improves emotional well-being for the over 40s.**

According to research by the Universities of Southampton and Birmingham, becoming a volunteer later on in life can result in good mental health and well-being.

This is something that Home-Start has always recognised in its home visiting volunteers, who will often tell us that they get just as much out of supporting a local family, as the family does in receiving support.

Interestingly, the study found that these effects did not apply before the age of 40, which could suggest that the association with volunteering may be stronger at certain points in people's lives.

The study suggests that further effort to engage middle-aged and older people in volunteering is needed. Whilst at Home-Start we would advocate the positive impact of volunteering for the over 40s, we'd also like to highlight that many younger people get an awful lot from their Home-Start volunteering experience. They may volunteer with us for different reasons; to gain skills that will enhance their career prospects, to use Home-Start volunteer as a stepping stone into further education, to increase their confidence, the list is endless.

But, back to the research, we would encourage any person over the age of 40 to considering volunteering for us, all they need is parenting experience, a non-judgemental attitude, and the ability to spare just a couple of hours each week to support a family in their own home.

But don't just take our word for it. This is what one of our volunteers, (whose 65), said about us.

"In the lead up to my retirement, I was so excited about the prospect of not having to get up for work anymore. To fill my days with things that I wanted to do, when I wanted to do them. But the reality soon kicked in- probably within the first few weeks! I was such an active, busy person, and all of a sudden, I had these endless hours to fill. My husband still worked, and there is only so much cooking and gardening you want to do! I knew about Home-Start because a friend's daughter had support. But I'd never thought about the other side- volunteering for them. I just picked up the phone, got accepted on to their training course, and I have never looked back. That was four years ago. In that time I have supported five families, with a whole range of needs- a mum with twins, a family who were suffering the loss of their eldest child, a mum with post- natal depression. Home-Start volunteering is not rocket science, it's just about going into someone's home and listening to them, offering emotional support and at times, practical support too. Picking up the phone that day was the best thing I ever did. My Home-Start families mean the world to me they have given me a whole new purpose and outlook to my life. I would say to anyone- just go for it- a couple of hours can change a family's life and yours too."

To find out more about volunteering for one of the seven Home-Starts across Greater Manchester, please visit [www.gmhomestarts.org.uk](http://www.gmhomestarts.org.uk)