

December is often a month when many of us think about those people who are less fortunate than us. It's a month- (because of Christmas) that we tend to focus on 'helping others', be that volunteering in a homeless shelter, donating gifts, or volunteering at a foodbank.

Whilst this is commendable and often much- needed, come January, people go back to their busy lives and only think about volunteering when Christmas comes around again.

At Home-Start we need volunteers all year. Families who are struggling to cope do so regardless of whether it's Christmas or any other time of the year.

Across Greater Manchester we currently support almost 800 families, we have an army of nearly 500 volunteers who once a week visit families in their own homes, offering a mix of practical and emotional support to parents who are finding life a challenge. There are so many reasons for this; postnatal depression, lack of family support networks, coping with multiple births... our volunteers spend just a couple of hours each week with a family in their own homes, walking alongside them until the day comes when the family is empowered enough to go it alone.

And our volunteers benefit just as much as the families they support.

"I retired early from work and within the first year I came to bitterly regret it. I was bored, lonely and my self-esteem was ebbing away. My children were grown up and I had no grandchildren, (something I had always longed for). My friend was a Home-Start volunteer down south and she urged me to sign up for the next training course local to me. That was three years ago. In that time I have supported four families with a range of support needs- a mum with anxiety, a family of triplets and a single dad- there is no such thing as a typical Home-Start family which makes the experience of volunteering even more rewarding- you are constantly learning new things about yourself from the families you support. Anyone that has experience of bringing up children and who can spare just a little bit of time should consider volunteering for Home-Start, it's the best thing I ever did. My Home-Start families will stay in my heart forever." (Home-Start volunteer).

If you feel inspired and want to find out more about volunteering for your local Home-Start in Greater Manchester please visit www.gmhomestarts.org.uk