

How isolation and loneliness impacts on parenting...

For the many years that the six Home-Starts in Greater Manchester have been supporting families, one issue that parents say they need support with never changes, and that's isolation.

Isolation can be caused by many things, poor mental health, lack of family support networks, not having English as your first language, poor housing and illness and disability to name but a few.

But having a Home-Start volunteer can make all the difference. This is Julia's story.

"For years I had suffered in silence, I was living away from my family and friends, as I had moved up North because of my partner's work. Having a three year old and a new baby just impacted on the isolation even more. I cried all the time and longed for the life I used to have back down South. I can honestly say it was affecting my parenting. When I couldn't cope any more I saw my GP who told me about Home-Start.

Every week my lovely volunteer Maggie would come, and as soon as I heard that knock on the door, this big smile would appear on my face. Maggie became the mum I needed in the North. She talked to me and listened to me, I could off load on her just like I would my own mum if she was close by.

As the months went on, my confidence began to increase, until the day came when I felt ready to go out in the local town with Maggie. Finally, I felt like a proper mum again- we went to the park, to the library, and then playgroups. I knew how much my toddler was enjoying being out and I felt guilty for denying him that before Home-Start. But, Home-Start is all about small steps that are taken at your own pace. Small steps that make a big difference.

Two years on and I am the mum I am because of Home-Start and because of Maggie. Home-Start has even impacted on my own mum, she used to be really worried about me and how isolated I was but was so relieved when I started to tell her about how Maggie was getting me out and about with the kids.

Maggie and Home-Start have inspired my own mum so much, that she's even considering becoming a Home-Start volunteer herself! I would recommend this life-saving charity to anyone; their volunteers are like guardian angels."

To find out how you can support a local family who are going through tough times, please visit www.gmhomestarts.org.uk