

## **Home-Start, a charity supporting families in need, explains why Christmas can be hard.**

Christmas is often a difficult time for the families that Home-Start supports. They are bombarded with marketing and advertising for presents that lots of families simply cannot afford.

But there's another side to Christmas that many people do not think about and that's food poverty.

While many of us are planning Christmas dinners, buying selection boxes, mince pies and all the other seasonal food items, Home-Start is seeing a rise in families who cannot afford to buy the basics, never mind Christmas food.

Food bank referrals are at an all time high, and while that solves an immediate food crisis, it doesn't address the long-term issue.

At Home-Start we start at grass roots with many of our families who are in this position.

Our volunteers support them in cooking healthily on a budget and planning meals. We encourage our families to understand that convenience food is often far more expensive than cooking from scratch.

One of our Home-Starts that supports families in north Manchester has developed this idea even further. Staff there have supplied 25 of their families with slow cookers, a recipe book and some essential ingredients to get started.

Shelley Byrne, who manages the branch said: "Food parcels are a great way of meeting immediate food poverty needs, but without supporting families to re-think the way they spend money on and utilise food, food parcels will also be needed. And with many local food bank referrals at an all-time high, there's never been a more vital time to approach this problem differently."

One of the mums who received a slow cooker from Home-Start said: "Now we can eat healthy family meals that don't cost the earth and take five minutes to prepare- better than any food parcel."

Home-Start is never going to be able to solve the issue of food poverty, but what we can and are doing is supporting local families in thinking differently and feeding their children on a small budget.

To find out more about ways to support Home-Start, visit the national website [www.home-start.org.uk](http://www.home-start.org.uk) or call 0800 068 63 68.