

It's that time of year when we all start to think about our New Year resolutions.

For many of us it's often about giving up things, but how about making this year the year when you try something new?

The seven Home-Starts across Greater Manchester are always looking for new volunteers to offer emotional and practical support to families who are struggling to cope.

And in 2015 all seven Home-Starts will be running training courses for new volunteers. Some people think that you need qualifications to become a Home-Start volunteer.

This is not true, what you need is parenting experience, a non-judgmental attitude and the ability to spare two to three hours a week to visit a local family in their own home.

What Home-Start volunteers offer is a shoulder to cry on, a listening ear and a practical pair of hands.

Home-Start supports families for so many different reasons. It might be to support a mum with post-natal depression, multiple births or a physical disability. It could be to support a dad who is bringing up his children on his own, or a parent who is feeling isolated as they have no friends and family nearby. The list is endless.

Our volunteers are not matched with their first family until they have completed the training course and they are always offered ongoing support and supervision with Home-Start staff.

Some volunteers use Home-Start as a stepping stone into further education and employment, others because they want to make a difference in their local community.

One Home-Start volunteer said: "At first I was unsure. I wasn't sure that I had the right skills and experience, but when I realised that as a parent I could empathise with what the family were going through, I knew that in my own way I could make a difference. I visit my family on a Thursday, I look forward to it all week, and when mum opens the door with a huge smile on her face, it confirms that volunteering for Home-Start was one of the best things I have ever done. I would urge anyone that can spare a couple of hours a week to become a Home-Start volunteer."

A mum supported by Home-Start said about her volunteer: "She's like my armbands in deep water. She kept me afloat when all I wanted to do was sink. Thanks to her, I am the mum that I am today."

If you have read this and feel inspired to find out more about becoming a Home-Start volunteer yourself, visit www.home-start.org.uk or call 0800 068 63 68.