

Can you spare a few hours a week, and make a difference to a local family that will last a lifetime.

Many parents across Greater Manchester will now be preparing for their children to go back to school. For some parents, this will be for the first time; as they get ready to drop their children off at the school gates, knowing they won't see them again until the afternoon.

Over the years many of our Home-Start volunteers have said this is the reason that they decided to volunteer for us. They struggled to fill the hours without their children, they missed their company and in some cases, said that they had started to feel isolated and in need of something new to do.

One Home-Start volunteer said: "I was the mum of twins, so there wasn't a spare minute of the day that I wasn't doing something to do with raising them- washing and ironing, feeding, bathing them, entertaining them with books, trips to the park.... I longed for the day when I could wave them off at the school gates. Then that day came, and I went home not quite knowing what to do. As the months wore on I became increasingly bored and frustrated. Yes, they had their new friends back for tea, and bed and bath times were chaotic as usual, but it was those hours between 9-3pm that I struggled with.

My mother in law was a Home-Start volunteer up in Scotland, and I knew that the charity had branches right around the country. So I rang the one local to me. After being accepted onto the prep course, I was matched to my first family. It was a mum with baby twins! What Home-Start is brilliant at doing is matching you with the right family. Not only was I a second pair of hands for this new mum, but I also had complete empathy and understanding in what it was like to be a mum of multiple births. Sometimes she's want to off load her concern and worries, other times she needed a hand in going to the park with a double buggy, or getting to Doctors appointments. No week was the same, which was brilliant.

You only have to spend a couple of hours a week with your Home-Start family, so it's not as though your own family miss out by not having you there. For me, I just knew that on a Thursday morning, I was making a real difference to another mum, she'd open the door with a huge smile on her face, a real sense of relief. There's no feeling quite like it, knowing that you as a volunteer are welcomed into a family's home.

I would say to anyone who was in the same position as me, at the school gates in September, if you feel that you can give just a few hours of your time to another mum or dad, please consider volunteering for Home-Start.

My own twins are now all grown up, living their own lives. In the last 15 years, I have supported seven Home-Start families and also volunteer at their family group too. A few years ago my husband said to me that Home-Start had come into my life just at the right time. He had seen such a difference in me, I had a renewed energy and a sense of purpose. Don't get me wrong, being a mum is the best job in the world, but volunteering for Home-Start comes a close second."

If you feel inspired by what you have read and would like to find out more about volunteering for any one of the seven Home-Starts across Greater Manchester, you can call 0800 068 63 68 or visit the national website- www.home-start.org.uk