

In a recent BBC survey, 28 per cent of British adults said that they felt lonely at some point, with ten per cent of those over the age of 65 saying they expect to spend Christmas mostly on their own.

One of the best ways to combat loneliness is to offer some of your free time to others by volunteering.

Over the last few months Home-Start has highlighted the differences that we make to families right across Greater Manchester. But we have never focussed on the difference that we make to our volunteers.

Our volunteers come from all walks of life with all kinds of experiences of their own to share with others. We have lots of volunteers who use their training and time with Home-Start as a stepping stone into further education and employment, but we also have volunteers who come to Home-Start because they miss their own families and or feel lonely.

In recent decades more and more families live away from each other, in other parts of the country, sometimes even the world. Because of this, many of our volunteers say they do not feel as though they spend enough time with their own grandchildren and that they miss the feeling of being a full time grandparent.

By becoming a Home-Start volunteer they say we have given them a 'role' again, a 'purpose'.

When Sue found out that she was going to become a grandmother, she was 'over the moon' but her happiness was short-lived when she found out that her daughter was moving away.

She said: "What should have been the best news ever was just veiled in sadness. I had all this love and advice I wanted to share, but seeing my new granddaughter every few months or so just wasn't enough. There was this big hole in my life, and as a new grandmother, I never dreamt I would feel like this, to be honest I felt a bit useless. I was retired, had all this time on my hands and nothing to do with it!"

Sue heard about Home-Start. "All I knew was they needed volunteers who had parenting experience. When I heard that sometimes a young family were just looking for a 'grandmother' figure, my heart leaped! Nothing would replace my own grandchild, but this just seemed a perfect way to help a local family and to stop me from feeling lonely and useless."

That was two years ago. When Sue's support with her first family ended, she went on to support another family whose child had a life-limiting illness.

Sue said: “It’s not all about cuddling babies, especially when you are supporting a family like the family I have now. But I am strong and happy in front of the mum, and I am there for her, a shoulder to cry on and just someone she can rely on. The other day, she said to me: ‘Sue, you are my surrogate mum, without you, and without Home-Start, my life would be so sad.’ To hear that, my heart just burst with pride.”

For just a few hours a week, you can make such a difference to a family in Greater Manchester.

To find out more visit www.home-start.org.uk or call 0800 068 6368.