

## **Some food for thought**

Christmas is often a difficult time for many families across Greater Manchester. They are bombarded with marketing and advertising for toys and presents that lots of them 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 children selection boxes, mince pies and all the other hundreds of seasonal food items, Home-Start Greater Manchester's leading family support charity, is seeing a rise in families who cannot afford to provide their children with the basics, never mind Christmas food.

We know that 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 grassroots with many of our families who are in this position.

Our volunteers support them in cooking healthily on a budget, meal planning and cooking the basics. We encourage our families to understand that convenience food is often far more expensive than cooking from scratch. The Home-Start that I manage in north Manchester has developed this idea further. We have supplied 25 of our families with slow cookers, a recipe book and some essential ingredients to get started.

Food parcels are a great way of meeting immediate food poverty needs but without supporting families to re-think the way they spend money and utilise food, food parcels will always be needed.

And with so many local food bank referrals at an all-time high, there's never been a more vital time to approach this problem differently.

The Home-Starts in Greater Manchester are never going to be able to solve the issue of food poverty, it's a national problem. But what we can do, and are doing, is support our local families in thinking differently about feeding children on a low budget.

**Shelley Byrne, Manager, Home-Start Manchester North  
(On behalf of the seven Home-Start charities across Greater Manchester.)**