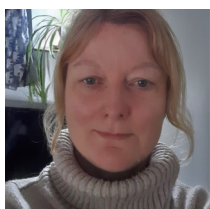


# HOME-START BRISTOL

Volunteer Newsletter APRIL 2021



Hello and welcome to our volunteer newsletter - a resource dedicated to keeping in touch with and supporting our volunteers



## Help us to shape the future of Home-Start Bristol

I am now 3 months into my new job as Manager of HSB and am so impressed by the work of our dedicated team of staff and volunteers, especially in light of the extra challenges due to the pandemic. I know that it has been frustrating for many of because you haven't been able to meet in person with your families so it is good news that we are able to restart outdoor meetings again, with safeguards in place of course.

As we start to come out of lockdown, we are also beginning to look to the future and consider how we want to strengthen and develop Home-Start Bristol over the coming years. To help us do that it is important that we get feedback from you as the people on the ground supporting families. The questions we are considering and would like your help with are:

**Why?** The reason why Home-Start Bristol exists is clear: *We support families to help them thrive and give children the best possible start in life.* Rest assured this won't change.

**Who?** Currently we support families with at least one child under the age of 5 years. Should we consider increasing this age range or is it right as it is? Are there families/family members that we are missing, who aren't seeking or getting our help?

**Where?** We currently work in Bristol and South Gloucestershire, do we want to expand to other areas, for example Bath?

**What?** The core of HSB is our home visiting service and we don't see this changing. However, we may want to also consider other ways of working for example groupwork, continuing with telephone/text support, or developing specific projects.

**How?** Home-Start Bristol has a unique selling point (USP) which is you our volunteers who support families in many ways. How could we strengthen and develop your role?

We would love to hear your comments and ideas on the above questions or anything else you would like to say. Please email them to me directly: [TerriFletcher@homestartbristol.org.uk](mailto:TerriFletcher@homestartbristol.org.uk) **Terri Fletcher (Manager HSB)**

## Peer support meetings (coffee mornings) for volunteers

We will continue to meet monthly via zoom—it's another way to keep in touch and update you on latest developments especially important as pandemic restrictions change/ease. Upcoming peer support zooms: **6th May, 10th June, 1st July and 5th August all at 10am.**



## Activity Packs for children and families UPDATE



Thank you to those who have helped and contributed to the development of our activity packs especially volunteers Lauren, Gemma and Maria for their enthusiasm and creativity. Beth and Susannah have been busy ordering resources and have put together packs around the themes of **Play**, **Art**, **Well-being**, **Story**, **Sleep** and **Weaning**. The packs are now in the office and ready to go out to families (**Grow** packs will be ready in a few weeks once the risk of frost is over). Through these packs we aim to develop children's learning and development alongside parental relationships. We hope that

parents will gain confidence in how to play and engage with their children. Volunteers will have a chance to deliver packs to their family, to chat about the contents and then follow up in a few weeks for feedback. By finding out how the family used the packs, it also gives us the opportunity to see if there is any other support that we can provide. Please ask your coordinator for an activity pack if you feel this would benefit your family.

*"The activity packs were really good as I can't normally afford to buy these things for my children. They all enjoyed making things with the various craft materials and the older children were able to read the books to the younger ones and help them with the jigsaw. The weaning bag had lots of really nice things in it and will be so useful in a couple of months' time."*

### NEWS: outdoor meet ups can now resume!

We are now allowed outdoor meet ups with families under the following conditions:

- Both the volunteers and the family are happy to go ahead with an outdoor meet up.
- Neither party has Covid symptoms or has tested positive for Covid prior to the meet up or are required to self isolate (please text your family to confirm that nothing has changed before each meet up, your coordinator can provide you an example text if that helps).
- If either the volunteer or family are in the high-risk category this needs to be risk assessed before the meet up.
- Both the family and volunteer will be required to follow government safety guidance, i.e. maintain social distancing of 2m, use PPE if required, and observe careful hygiene measures (i.e. sanitise/wash hands before and after the meet up).
- The meet up can take place in an outdoor public space or the family's garden, providing that there is separate external access.
- Please note that **HSB is not allowing any indoor meetings with families** at this time.



If you are happy to go ahead, your coordinator will contact you to go through a risk assessment and discuss ideas for keeping safe during the meet up. The family will also be asked to complete a risk assessment. If at any stage either party no longer feels comfortable to meet outside then we can reassess. This could appear to be a lot of paperwork, but our absolute priority is to keep everyone safe. There is no expectation that all volunteers will start outdoor meetings unless completely happy to do so. However, we know that many of you are very keen to resume face to face meetings with families and so we hope this will be welcome news.

Our next **Volunteer Preparation Course** starts later this month on 28th April. Sadly we're still not able to meet in a classroom yet so we're continuing with Zoom for now in the hope that better weather might enable us to meet outdoors for a few sessions. So far we've had some fabulous applications to join our volunteering team and hopefully you'll be able to meet them soon at a future peer support session. Keep spreading the word about HSB among your friends and relations ... we need more volunteers just like you!

## Volunteer Voice: Focussing on family strengths

### Volunteer Rep Maroussia talks about how she has used the recent training on brief solution focused approaches



Many of us had a chance recently to attend Issy Martin's session on Solution Focussed Advice & Techniques - about how to have better conversations with our families (thanks Issy!). A big take away for me was how we can help our Mums focus on the positives and see themselves as more competent and capable. Asking about problems will lead to a conversation about... problems! And may end up with Mum feeling even more depressed / anxious /negative /sad /hopeless.

Now, to avoid opening with 'problems', I tend to ask what the children are up to. Especially with a new family, this always feels like a good way of establishing contact and getting a feel for the family.

Recently on an initial call with a new family (where there had been no face-to-face contact) I asked Mum to tell me about the children, their personalities, what they liked to do. She told me a bit about her 4-year-old boy and his little sister but it was general and vague and felt like the conversation was running out of steam fast. I asked what the interactions were like between siblings. Mum said they were fine in a rather noncommittal way, but then opened up about how she worried that her little boy spent too much time playing alone in his bedroom while she looked after the toddler in the living room or did chores. *Our subsequent conversation went a bit like this:*

**VOL:** If he can be content playing by himself it sounds like he's got a fabulous imagination! *(Seeing a positive in the situation.)*

**VOL:** Do you have any hunch why he might be reluctant to play in the living room? *(Reminding Mum that she is the expert!)*

**MUM:** He doesn't let me bring his toys through. He hates it if anyone touches his stuff and gets really upset. *(Through talking about a specific situation I'm finding out a lot more about the child than when we talked in general terms).*

As mum tells me more, it appears that he is very attached to certain toys and likes to be in control of situations.

**VOL:** So it might not be that he doesn't want to be in the living room or around you and his sister, it might be about being in control? *(Rephrasing is a powerful way of making someone feel that they're being listened to.)*

**MUM:** I don't know...

**VOL:** Do you think it might work if he had a special bag and he chose some toys to bring into the living room to play with? *(Checking with Mum to see if she relates to the idea)*

**MUM:** He's got his own rucksack, which he loves. He might be ok with it if he's choosing, if he feels in control.

We carry on bouncing ideas off each other – Mum suggests asking him to choose three toys, which he can go and swap whenever he likes. Mum is a partner in this search for a solution, she is the one who knows the situation and her child.

**VOL:** How about trying it out this week and seeing what happens? You can let me know when we talk next week. And if it doesn't seem to be the right thing for him, it doesn't matter!

The following week Mum was delighted to report that her son loved to pack his bag, was eager to talk about what he was putting in it, and played around her in the living room much more. Mum was really happy that a situation she found stressful had been made easier, and her relationship and communication with her little boy had improved. They hopefully both felt empowered and that someone had really listened to them. I wanted to share this situation with you because it felt so positive for me as a volunteer, for Mum and for her son. Of course it's not very often that things just come together this way. It was a mix of listening, of putting out feelers and pot luck.

And now, after Issy's training, I think I will end my calls by asking Mum to think of something special and happy, to revisit a 'sparkling moment', no matter how tiny, so that I can hopefully leave her with a smile on her face.

# Feedback Volunteer Coffee Morning 22nd April 2021

## OUTDOOR VISITS:

All the volunteers present were hoping to go back to face-to-face volunteering.

A reminder from Terri: **no home visiting is currently allowed**. But we are delighted to be able to meet families outdoors, where both volunteer and the family feel happy with this. Terri reminded us that we should not start face-to-face visiting before having been in touch with our co-ordinator for a risk assessment. Use a mask and sanitiser where it feels appropriate.

A practical tip: it is fine for the volunteer to push the buggy as long as we sanitise before and after.

**The onus is on vols to check with the family ahead of each visit whether the situation has changed.**

We should be using Home-Start numbers and not our personal phones. If anyone has any problems with this please let the office know.

## OTHER DISCUSSION:

In break-out rooms we discussed balancing the need to socially distance with children's mental health, and how children might feel if adults back away from them and avoid contact. If a child was showing signs of wanting a cuddle with a volunteer Beth suggested that maybe Mum could be the one giving a big hug.

Most of us attended one of Issy Martin's training sessions. The general feeling was that it had been very helpful, interesting and enjoyable. Several volunteers reported making a conscious effort to help the family focus more on the positives.

## What to look forward to in future coffee mornings?

Beth will tell us more about **activity packs**. Though the families keep the packs, volunteers might be involved in distributing them, helping families learn to use them, and they can be a good conversation opener.

We also considered content that we would like to cover in coming sessions, such as children with **special education needs** / autism. And we could also kick off with a **case study**, with someone presenting a family, talking about a situation they found difficult, about a breakthrough with a family, or whatever else is arising! We would love to hear more from volunteers either during coffee mornings or in the newsletter.

Finally different possibilities are being examined for volunteers to have a platform to swap tips, questions, donated items, etc. Facebook is one possibility, though half of the volunteers present today don't use FB. Or maybe a volunteer-only page when the new HSB website comes in.

As ever, your time, your energy and your thoughts are always welcome. We hope you enjoy the sun, and the new possibilities that lie ahead for us and for our visiting!

Best wishes

**Celia, Janet & Maroussia (Volunteer Reps)**





## What's happening at Home Start Bristol

### Easter food deliveries

On Thursday 1st April we delivered food parcels to 16 families across our area – to support them during the Easter holidays. The food parcels were funded by Quartet and the fresh food was supplied by Trent's Food Hall in Frampton Cotterill, with additional Easter chocolate goodies from our friends at John Lewis and Waitrose. Deliveries on the day were made by staff and volunteers – special thanks to Claire, Nikita, Lee, Sue, Clare, Lynne & Ann.

These food parcels make such a welcome contribution to families, as one mum told us: *"I made spag bol with the first lot, then I did a lovely roast dinner. There was loads of food, enough for 4 different meals."*



### Catch up with volunteer Ann (trained Jan-March 2020)

**How did you find out about Home-Start Bristol (HSB)?** Via an internet search for volunteering opportunities in my area.

**How did you find the volunteer training?** I really enjoyed meeting other like-minded people and getting involved in something completely different to my day job. The training was also very thought provoking and helped highlight and think through social issues that I wouldn't normally spend time considering or helping with.

**How are you finding it now you're visiting a family?** It was frustrating not being able to meet in person due to all the lockdowns (I finished my training just as the pandemic started). As well as being unable help the family physically get out of the house, which is the main thing that Mum struggles with as she has 3 very young children. However, I have been able to do phone support and provide help in other ways, such as providing a friendly ear for her to vent to, and in helping Mum prioritise her admin/paperwork which had built up due to house move and needing to claim benefits etc.

**What are some of the best things about volunteering so far – any highlights?** Taking food parcels around at Christmas and Easter which provided an excuse to meet Mum and the children - even if it was only on the doorstep!

**What are you finding most challenging?** Not being able to meet up and provide more hands-on help. Hope this will change in the near future as restrictions ease.

*Photo: Ann ready to make her Easter food delivery!*



The idea of this newsletter is to help keep all our volunteers up to date, by bringing you a round up of news and will try to do this monthly, please let us have ideas for stories to include and any feedback

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