

Home-Start Bristol annual report 2021-22



Supporting parents when they need help
the most because childhood can't wait

Overview and learning

Support for Families

The last few years have been challenging for everyone, but have also offered opportunities to do things differently. Home-Start Bristol has at its heart support for parents by parents, delivered in the family home and this remains our core service. However, we have learned that support delivered by phone, text and online can also be an effective way of providing regular and vital communication with families, and some have found this more accessible than face-to-face support. We are therefore continuing to offer this menu of support going forward.

Healthy Lifestyle - During the pandemic there was a greater emphasis on meeting families outdoors. This has provided an opportunity to think about different ways to encourage families to connect to nature and their local community as well as building healthier habits.

We also developed our food project, in response to increasing food poverty, delivering healthy ingredients to families to cook together as well as suggesting ideas for outdoor (and indoor family activities). We supplied basic equipment such as picnic blankets, balls and hand held food blenders to support families who would otherwise struggle to buy them. We are now developing this project thanks to funding and support from Warburtons.

Family Needs

Unsurprisingly, family needs have gone up over the last two years. In both Bristol and South Glos we received more referrals than we were able to accept. Last year we also recorded an upswing in referrals for particular groups of families:

- where there is a history of domestic abuse
- who have or may have children with special needs
- who have had babies during the pandemic;
- who have given birth to twins and triplets.

Developing Projects

We are planning to develop projects to support these particular groups of families, to better understand their needs and provide a more bespoke service.



Improving mental health by linking families together

The pandemic has increased isolation for many families who were already feeling alone. We are hearing more and more from women in families that they would like opportunities to meet with other mothers to share experiences, ideas and just make new friends.

"It would be really helpful to be able to talk to other mums, so I don't feel alone and that I'm the only one feeling and struggling the way I do".

Home-Start Bristol has historically focussed on offering individual support to families and this is often what parents need initially to establish trust and confidence. Going forward we are keen to work with families to develop a support model that moves from an individual to a collective empowerment focus, bringing women and families together to increase their support networks, local connections, and create opportunities for mutual support and local action.

What did we deliver this year?

During this year we received 266 referrals - 37% from Health visitors and midwives; 30% from Support workers and community workers, 12% from self referrals; 8% from social work teams; 6% from specialist mental health workers, 2% from schools and nurseries and 5% from other agencies.

Home-Start Bristol
received

266

Referrals

We were able to support

165

Families during the last
year

This year we supported
over

412

children

79%

of families were
referred because of
Mental Health issues

89%

Of families reported
feeling isolated

42%

of families were headed
by a lone parent

94%

experienced
improved mental and
emotional health

82%

reported that their need
had decreased and they
could cope better

87%

reported
An improvement in their
children's behaviour and
development

57%

of referred families live in
the 30% most deprived
neighbourhoods

19%

of parents referred for
support this year were from
ethnic minority groups

**HOME
START**

Coping Better

By the end of our support we want families to feel better able to cope with their difficulties and manage family life more successfully.

Family Needs

During the pandemic years and as a result of cost of living increases, we have seen family needs going up and becoming increasingly complex. More families are experiencing food and fuel poverty, leading to an unprecedented number of referrals to food and baby banks for the second year running. Many families have felt more isolated as a result of the pandemic, especially if their baby was born during this time and their usual support networks were unavailable.

The most common reasons for referral to Home-Start Bristol over the last 2 years have been:

- parental mental health and well-being;
- family isolation;
- help to access services;
- low self-esteem;
- coping with day-to-day family life;
- help with children's behaviour and development.

How we measure the difference made

When a family is first visited they are asked to score themselves against a range of coping measures on a scale of 0 - 5, where 0 is not coping at all and 5 is coping really well. This scoring is repeated at the review and the end visits so that we can see the distance travelled.



"It's helped my mental and emotional health, it has given me the right perspective to challenge other agencies that have been letting me down. It has given me a safe space to be heard which has been invaluable, as struggling to meet my children's needs, I have lost having my own needs met and this has helped me be heard."

"The support will benefit me in the future as I have had such a high standard of support and care that I haven't had from other agencies. Someone I didn't know can get to know me and support me. You helped me challenge my feelings over asking for financial support and completing the DLA forms which will have a really positive impact on our family. I feel I can cope with things now that I couldn't before."

Example of a family in Bristol supported to cope better with family life

Family Y: Mum was stressed and struggling to manage her four girls. The only routine in place was around the school run for the oldest child and she was struggling to deal with the children's behaviour.

Home-Start provided practical support to help the family with their move away from a domestically abusive situation, including making applications to buy furniture, and emotional support with behaviour and routines. The whole family is now coping better with family life, is less stressed and has settled in well to a new house and area.

Improved Mental Health

Through our support we want parents and children to experience improved mental and emotional health.

94%

Of families reported improved mental and emotional health this year following support from Home-Start Bristol.

We think largely because we are a listening ear for families during very challenging times and can provide practical as well as emotional support.

Families' Mental Health

The last two years have testing ones in terms of families' mental health, with parents more isolated during lockdowns without access to some of their usual support systems. The pandemic has particularly impacted on mothers during this time, especially those whose children were born during the pandemic, and who also managed the additional pressure when schools and nurseries were closed, as well as coping with family illness. Cost of living increases have further impacted family mental health and wellbeing.

Families and referring agencies have also reported mental health and other impacts on children during this time. A recent report by Ofsted highlighted the ongoing effect that the pandemic is having on under 5's:

"Young children's development, following the pandemic, has been particularly worrying", the chief inspector of Ofsted has said.

Often the feedback from parents who have received support indicates that it is the small things that can make a big difference, a kind word, a 15-minute break to get something done, playing together with the children, a cup of tea and time to share a worry and be listened to.

"My volunteer is lovely, she always has time to listen and never seems to bore of my moaning! "



"My volunteer was amazing, so kind, she listened to me, was helpful, got me out, found me a group to go to with my child, reassured me, calmed me. I feel stronger and much more able to cope now.

I think my daughter really enjoyed the visits. She is a very social baby. She really enjoyed being with the volunteer. who was teaching her new stuff. She helped with making boundaries. I learnt a lot, as she is a parent as well, she had many brilliant ideas. She gave me confidence. I have built my confidence too. I felt like my volunteer really matched with what I needed. Her experience really helped me. It was just what I wanted. Every time I met her I felt happy."

(Bristol family, dad worked, the mum was visually impaired and struggling to get to groups and establish sleep routines for her baby.)



Healthier Lifestyles

We support families to engage in more family-centred activities and make healthier lifestyle choices.

Home visiting is the core of our service for families. However, during lockdown we adapted our support to include telephone, text and online support as well as outdoor meetings and activities. With the help of local partners like John Lewis, Waitrose and White Stuff we have also been able to provide families with much needed essential supplies of food, nappies and basic household equipment.

To support families' wellbeing we have developed activity packs for doorstep deliveries including plants to grow, outdoor activities, art and craft materials, toys and books and wellbeing packs for frazzled parents. The aim is to help families to relax, play and have fun together. These developments have been popular with families and have helped to meet family needs. We are therefore going to continue to include them as part of our menu of support.

Last year families were part of our healthy food project, receiving ingredients and healthy meal recipes during holiday times and activities for families to do together such as outdoor nature eye spy, colouring and reading activities. With the support of their worker or volunteer families were encouraged to make healthy meals from scratch. One family reported cooking and eating Sunday lunch together for the first time.

87%

of families reported an improvement in their children's behaviour and development.

"My volunteer has helped me and my child to play outdoors. She encourages us to take managed risks like playing in the shallow stream. My child's independence has grown. My volunteer takes my child out to play without me. She is the only person they have done this with."



A family with a child who has autism and is non verbal. His behaviour was experienced as challenging by his mother and was impacting on their relationship. His mum did not feel confident to take her son outside of the house. The volunteer established a routine taking the family out to the park after school and worked on sleep and potty training. A's sleeping patterns and behaviour improved and mum felt confident for them to go out.



A young pizza maker

Feeling Better Connected

We help parents in isolated families to increase their knowledge about local services building confidence to connect to other families and support.

During the pandemic it was more difficult to connect families to services as many were not operating at normal service levels, were oversubscribed and often unable to work with families in their homes. This was particularly challenging at a time when families were feeling increasingly isolated.

One of the key roles of Home-Start volunteers is to help to break that isolation, first by supporting families in their homes and then linking families to other services and groups in their neighbourhoods and communities. Over the coming year we are also going to focus on developing Home-Start groups in partnership with children's centres and other family focussed organisations

78%

**of families reported
feeling less isolated in their communities**

56 families accessed/were signposted to 127 services including; Children's Centres, support services for children with special needs, adult education, benefits advice, food and baby banks, housing advice, domestic abuse services, mental health support and other local community groups.

"My volunteer was amazing – so kind and helpful, she listened to me, got me out of the house and helped me find a baby group to go to. I feel stronger and much more able to cope now."



A family from Europe and Asia had recently moved to Bristol, they speak three languages in the home. The mother M said she had not connected with any other families locally and could not attend groups because of the pandemic. She has a young baby and a toddler who was being assessed for social communication difficulties/ASD. She found getting out a challenge as his behaviour can be challenging and he needs very close supervision. M was very keen to build a network of friends but needed support to do this, e.g. physical help getting out of the flat with both children. Although dad is supportive when he is at home, he works long hours in the day. M had no friends locally. She felt very isolated.

Needs and coping increase 3.2

Coordinator's summary: M is doing really well. She is getting out and about, is meeting other families in their local park on a weekly basis and has signed her children up to groups. She no longer feels isolated and is motivated and happy for her and her family's future.

Family Feedback: *It was so nice to have another adult to talk to during this time when I was new to the area had just had a baby and didn't know anyone or was able to go out.*

Case Studies

Families are usually supported for an average of 6 months but sometimes longer depending on their needs

Family 1: The family made a self referral, mum was very tearful. She had an eight-week-old baby feeding constantly and refusing to be put down; he doesn't like the pushchair so she can't even take him out in that. Mum is struggling to get a routine. She has no family close by to support her and doesn't feel confident to get into town for a drop-in session. She is mostly struggling with looking after herself, getting enough rest and something to eat and drink while caring for the needs of the baby.

Needs and coping increase 3.3

Family Feedback: My volunteer showed me ways in which I can get on with jobs AND keep my son happy such as moving some of his equipment into the kitchen and remaining connected with him through eye contact and talking.

Volunteer Feedback: I saw a HUGE difference in Mum's self-esteem and confidence during her weeks of support and felt that she was much more able to cope with what life throws at her moving forward. Meanwhile the baby's development was a pleasure to watch and be part of such a well-natured, intelligent, happy little boy.

Coordinator Feedback: Mum had no local friends or family who could come into the home and give her some time for herself, so having the volunteer visit weekly she said was a godsend; having time to shower, prepare a meal, tidy up, put washing on, etc. The afternoon after the volunteer had visited was always really lovely as Mum knew she had achieved so much and was able to relax and enjoy quality time with her son.

Family 2: Mother is a lone parent. She was moved by the council and misses the support network she had before. She is also experiencing racial abuse. Her mental health is poor owing to existing health conditions that are making her anxious about the future.

Needs and coping increase 3.2

My volunteer has made me a more confident person, more able to cope with life and its demands and my children are happier as a result. My daughter goes to a toddler group, she plays with children her age and is learning so quickly. Having been born in lockdown this was important to me. Home-Start has encouraged my son's love for football by buying him new football boots and a football shirt and I now take him to the park to kick a ball around and also to the skatepark with his new scooter. My volunteer made me feel good. She gave me a positive feeling. I am not depressed anymore. Even when she couldn't visit she called me and this was great. It felt like she was still with me. We can now sit at the table and eat a meal together (John Lewis Christmas table purchase), this makes me happy and my children happy. I feel able to go to toddler groups on my own now and I have a few people there I can talk to.



Case Studies

A mother who was an asylum seeker recently split from the father of her child (1.5yrs) and unborn baby. There was an incident of domestic abuse previously reported. The mum has no support in the UK, very low income, and is living in a small, unsuitable flat. Mum has no friends apart from one neighbour and suffers with depression. She is very keen to access any support.

Needs and coping increase after support 3.9

The volunteer said: I feel Home-Start was able to support this family at a crucial transition time in their lives, which has left them all more confident to navigate the future. Mum has a partner, but is a single mum 90 per cent of the time. I started supporting her when she was eight months pregnant, very tired and living in Home Office accommodation which was far too small for her needs. She is now in a lovely house, and is confidently parenting her two young children. She has already accessed local playgroups - the first time with me, and the second time on her own.

We went to local parks together and her oldest child is becoming much more confident in interacting with other children and accessing the play equipment. He loves to watch what the older children are doing, and I've encouraged mum to take him more often. On a practical level, I was able to give mum some English medical books because she really wants to one day go back to nursing, I helped her register with her new GP practice, and I introduced her to the local area which I know very well.

The family said:

"The volunteer made me feel 'happy' again. My older child adores her. She gave me time to rest when I was pregnant, 1:1 time with my baby after she was born and time for a shower in peace. She was very kind and thoughtful. I didn't have to tell her what to do she just knew and did it!"



Louise and Teddy (names changed) were born 11 weeks premature during lockdown.

They are now 15 months old, the family has limited support. Mum's mental health is not good, she described going for a shower to

cry. Dad reports that they feel they have reached the end of what they can cope with alone. Mum is unable to get out of the house and has no visiting friends. Mum has been on only two walks since coming home from the intensive care unit.

Needs and coping increase after support 3.3

Coordinator's Feedback In mums words, *"I feel 100% better in every way than before Christmas"*. S is now confident in her abilities as a mum, is taking the boys out and about, and although sometimes tricky, is now able to see the positives and not purely the negative aspect of situations. She is meeting up with other mums, and even supported another twin mum who was struggling.

A is a teenage mum (17 years old) who was bullied at school and underachieved at GCSE. She left and went to college where she met the baby's father. They are still in a relationship, and he is spending as much time with her as college allows. A lives with her parents who are supportive and will help with the baby. However, her parents are back at work. A is suffering with low mood; she is lonely as she has long days with the baby. She has spoken to her GP about her mood and is reluctant to take any anti-depressants.

Needs and coping increase 4:

Family feedback: *"Me and the volunteer got on so well and she really made me feel comfortable. She helped me see the positive in situations and helped me not blame myself so much."*

Volunteers at Home-Start Bristol

Volunteers are at the heart of our support

We currently have 73 volunteers in our pool, all of whom have completed a training course run by Home-Start Bristol. There have been ongoing challenges with recruitment and placement of volunteers due to rates of Covid infection in families, volunteers and staff. This has necessitated more thorough risk assessments before matching volunteers. Over the last year we have recruited and trained 32 volunteers

To make the training course more accessible to potential volunteers we have shortened it from eight to six weeks but over longer days that still fit in with school pick up and drop offs. We have had positive feedback from volunteers about this change. In addition we focussed on marketing the course with more community publications and networks. This resulted in an increased cohort of 14 volunteers for our January 2022 course.

Extra training was also offered to volunteers this year in Trauma-Informed Approaches, Brief Solution-Focused Conversations and working with families who have children with additional needs as well as two safeguarding update sessions run by the Home-Start Bristol manager.



Volunteer Feedback

***What I like best** about being a Home-Start Bristol volunteer is feeling I can make a difference. A new mum I supported was doing amazingly with her newborn baby, but going outside caused her panic attacks. On an early visit we went to the local shop together. She impressed me with her mental arithmetic, keeping track of her budget all the way. But when we got to the till the panic attack began. I just stood by her side, making silly faces at the baby to keep him entertained, and fielded the small talk at the till. She arrived home looking very white and trembling, but after she'd put away her shopping she let out a whoop of delight and did a little dance. It was the first time she'd had food in the cupboards since becoming a mother.*

She said she couldn't have done it alone.



Organisation issues

Changes at Home-Start Bristol

Over the course of the last five years, Home-Start Bristol has seen several changes, with two new managers succeeding the longstanding manager and a number of well-established staff taking retirement or moving on to new careers. This has brought challenges but also opportunities. Our new staff have young families themselves and appreciate some of the struggles that the families we support are going through. They have also had the experience of home schooling during lockdowns and managing the work/home balance when children and other family members have been ill with Covid.

During this time we have been well supported through the changes by our established board of trustees, all local Bristol residents themselves. More recently, several have retired leading to the recruitment of a new chair, Kate Oliver, who has volunteered and worked for many local charities. She has been a co-counsellor, foster carer, researcher, public sector manager and charity manager and director, focussing on the welfare of children and young people. The manager Terri Fletcher, has a background in charity management, family support and children's mental health and wellbeing.

Strategic Priorities for 2022 - 25

As a result of feedback from families, volunteers and staff we have updated our strategic plan and have identified the following priority areas:

- Integrate a strength-based, inclusive and diversity-aware approach in our work and across the organisation
- Plan and develop group and peer support opportunities for parents, to build social networks and connections
- Develop and fundraise for new projects, based on need and greater inclusion
- Continue to develop a menu of support for families (telephone, text, digital and outdoor) and monitor its effectiveness
- Diversify funding streams and develop income generation opportunities.

We will be focussing on these areas over the coming year in our funding and development plans.

We thank all of the statutory bodies, trusts, businesses and individuals who have supported and enabled us to achieve our goals this year. Full accounts are available via the Charity Commission website

The Staff Team

Terri Fletcher (HSB Manager)
Alex Wyatt (Coordinator)
Ina Hume (Coordinator)
Beth Milne (Coordinator)
Marie Wathen (Family Support)
Katherine Stephens (Marketing Administrator)
Becky Lockyer (Data Administrator)

Our Trustees

Kate Oliver (Chair)
Katherine Martin (HR)
Trevor Leonard (Treasurer)
Linda Hunter (Safeguarding)
Rita Deegan (Quality Assurance)
Helen Greer (Funding)
Cath Potter (Marketing)
Plus all of our 73 amazing volunteers



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