

2002-2022

HOME  
START

West Somerset

HAPPY 20TH  
BIRTHDAY

## Annual Review

April 2021 - April 2022



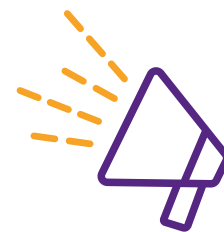
We are celebrating being a local family support charity that has been operational for 20 years, helping families with young children deal with whatever life throws at them. We help families affected by isolation, bereavement, illness, mental health issues, financial insecurity and much more.

Our local community network of trained volunteers and expert support helps families with young children through their toughest times, **because childhood can't wait.**

## The Home-Start Approach

### Our place in the wider systems of family support

Home-Starts come alongside families in their challenging times with humility, humanity and humour, led by volunteers who have time to care, have experience and understanding of family life, and can be flexible in their approach.



### Meeting parents on their own terms

It is the ordinary interactions outside more formal approaches, and the value of connection, that stand out to parents as being of benefit. The little things that make a difference in an ordinary way, without stigma, thresholds or diagnosis, and before situations deteriorate, and add up to bigger impacts.

Support from Home-Start helps parents to make connections with peers, build their social networks, normalise the challenges of parenting and receive practical help. This support is provided in a holistic way, tailored to the particular needs of the family.

Home-Starts across the UK are alongside parents in relation to a wide range of issues – from healthy eating and managing routines to financial budgeting and employability, and from difficulties in relationships to poor mental health. We support parents in practical and emotional ways.

### How Home-Start's model makes a difference

When families find themselves vulnerable, they might need to realise and build on their strengths. Our core model of volunteer-led home-visiting support, provided alongside a wide range of projects, activities, group support and targeted interventions in response to local need, allows us to work responsively with parents to meet their unique needs.

The science of child development and resilience suggests a set of 'design principles' that those in decision-making positions or providing a service for families can use to guide them in finding ways to improve outcomes for children and families.

The strength in the Home-Start model is that we can hold in mind these essential principles and use them not only to inform our approach but also to tailor the support offered to a family.

### Our mission

Home-Start believes that children need a happy and secure childhood and that parents play the key role in giving their children a good start in life and helping them achieve their full potential.

Home-Start's mission is to offer support, friendship and practical help to parents with young children in local communities – helping them to grow in confidence, strengthen their relationship with their children and widen their links with the local community.



#### Home-Start support works on many levels:

- Helping to identify emerging difficulties early on.
- Preventing worsening mental health.
- Signposting and facilitating access to allied or specialist services.
- Strengthening community networks.
- Reducing stigma.
- Reducing social isolation.
- Promoting healthy relationship development.
- Increasing parents' confidence in their parenting and personal capacities.
- Building opportunities for positive interactions.
- Supporting people to manage their emotions.
- Modelling parenting skills.



## Together With Families

Over the past 20 years, we've helped hundreds of families and given thousands of children a better start in life.

Families are facing a costs of living crisis like never before – with many who were just about managing now pushed into poverty. And there continues to be significant need for early years support as families are still reeling from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Across the UK during the pandemic so much has been placed on hold, but child development is not something that can wait. We have observed parental burnout and isolation, pressure on parental and child mental health and the very real effects of poverty on families.

Parents are worried about lost opportunities for play and socialisation, and they are anxious because their children have missed out on so much.

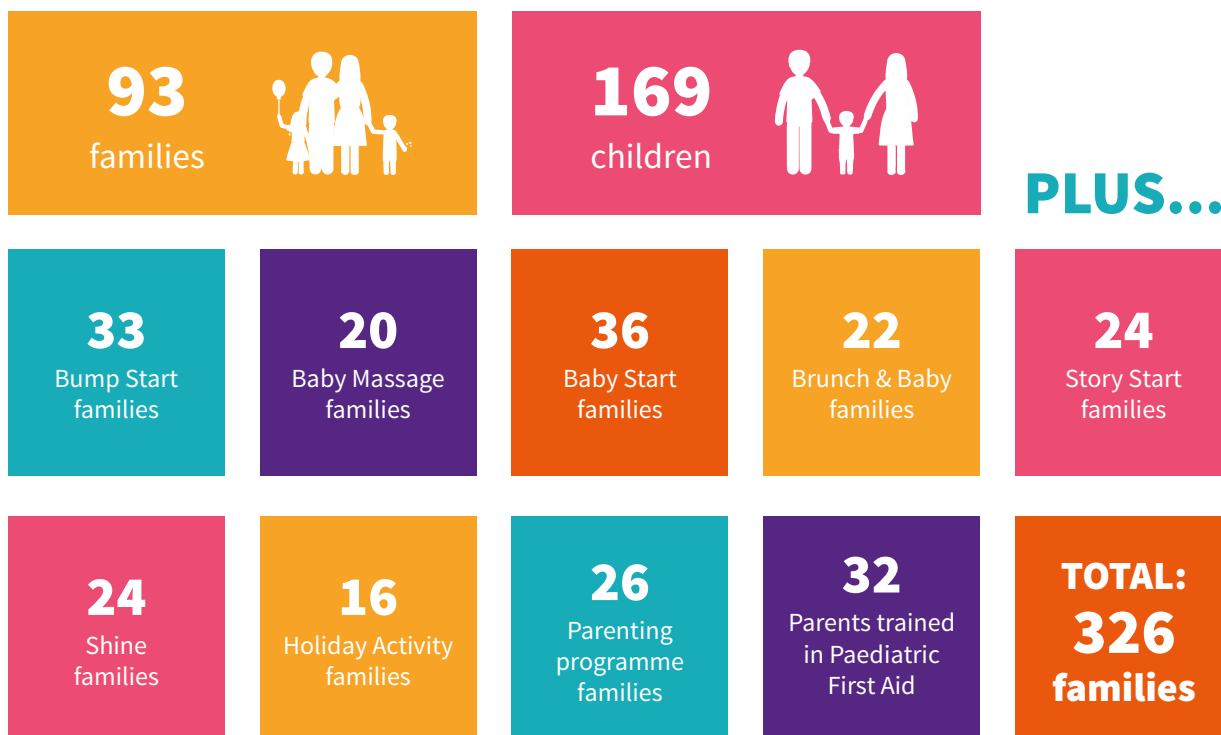
We all want to see children have the best possible start in life and Home-Start West Somerset can continue to develop and take on a bigger role and meet the true scale of demand from parents and children.

### The power of parents and the importance of home

Home-Start West Somerset is built upon a model of parent-powered support, which directly addresses some of the stressors that are impacting families. We seek to build upon parents' strengths, to empower and enable them so that they can move forwards in their lives with renewed and restored capacities. Our families told us that a trusted relationship between parent and volunteer that starts in the home is one of the key drivers of impact. It has enabled many to feel more comfortable about asking for help and more confident. Importantly, Home-Start West Somerset support also meant parents have felt less judged by others.



### 2021-2022: Home-Start West Somerset supported families with home visiting volunteers:



## Bump-Start



### Offering support to all expectant parents across Somerset



**Expecting a baby can be tough!** Through our comprehensive Bump-Start programme, we aim to offer expectant parents knowledge, empowerment, and skills to support their growing family. This is offered through a variety of antenatal workshops, postnatal baby groups, one to one help and support, all delivered by our friendly Bump-start coordinators.



### Increasing our Bump-Start support for new parents

We know the first 1,000 days of being a parent are now accepted to be the most significant in a child's development. It can also present some of the most challenging moments for parents. We've seen the difference our Bump-Start initiatives have made to parents, and we're looking forward to exploring how we can do more of this to better support parents.

There's a real fear in admitting you're struggling when you have a new baby. There's a stigma around asking for help, alongside this myth of a perfect parent. Asking for help is difficult, and it takes a lot of courage. When families first get in touch with us we always say to them that they've taken the most difficult step.

Home-Start volunteers have trusting relationships with families. By training our volunteers, we can help them understand and how they, as volunteers, can best support parents. It's about encouraging communication, understanding why they cry and responding to it. It's about providing a baby with a secure environment. Our trusted volunteers are the perfect people to help new parents with this. And we know that parents being responsive to their baby will achieve the best long-term outcomes for the child.



Baby Imogen

“ Last weekend we welcomed our baby Imogen into the world. It was quite the process - I was induced due to waters breaking but no contractions, and I ended up needing an emergency C-Section as baby gave us a bit of a fright. But all went well, and she's happy and healthy!

We wanted to thank you so much for all the information and support you gave us with the birthing workshops - even though our plan went out the window, the information we learnt from you meant we were able to get through it with relative calm. (We did skin to skin ASAP after the surgery!) ”

Bump-Start Mum





## Baby Massage

Baby Massage has been a longstanding parenting tradition in many cultures, such as in India and Africa. It was introduced to the western world around 30 years ago and has gained in popularity in the UK since the late 1990s.

We deliver this Internationally recognised baby massage course (International Association of Infant Massage IAIM) over a 5-week course. The sessions last for 2 hours with a combination of demonstration of baby massage strokes, some theory and parent to parent discussion which will be agreed as a relevant topic agreed by the group from the previous week.



Our course teaches parents and carers a sequence of rhythmic strokes and soothing holds which have been developed and refined over many years.

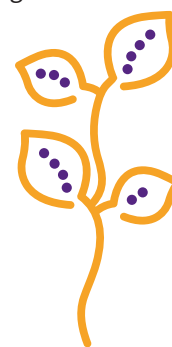
### The main areas of benefits of baby massage are:

- Interaction and Bonding - Enjoyable one to one quality time with your baby and secure attachment
- Relaxation - Increased levels of calming helps to improve sleep patterns
- Relief - Helps to reduce gas or colic, teething discomfort, skin disorders and excessive crying
- Stimulation - All major systems in body benefit from touch and massage

### Benefits for parents/carers are:

- Enjoy focused time with your baby
- The opportunity to socialise in a welcoming and supportive environment
- Have fun whilst learning a life-long skill

Massaging your baby provides a wonderful opportunity for expressing the high need for touch and affection that is so essential for the healthy development of all babies.



*Theresa*

### STAFF PROFILE

Hello! My name is Theresa and I am the Bump-Start Coordinator for Home-Start West Somerset. My professional background is in Nursing, Early Years Education and family support in a voluntary role for Home-Start. I have worked as a nurse and nurse educator for the past 40 years as well as teaching in early years for many years.

I am quite an energetic person and really enjoy social and professional interaction with families as well as my own personal family where I fulfil my role as a mother and grandmother which I thoroughly enjoy.

I love playing tennis on a regular social basis and play in a competitive match role representing Minehead Tennis Club. I hasten to add only ever mixed or ladies doubles not singles!

I thoroughly love my job role delivering the Antenatal Care Sessions (Real Birth Workshops) every week for mums to be as well as encouraging to include dads to be. It is pleasing to see as we have a good number of dads attending as well so everyone benefits!

The great thing is, I then get to see the mums and dads again when they then come along to baby massage about four weeks after baby is born which is just so rewarding as I love babies and children.



## Baby-Start

**Baby-Start is a practitioner led baby group for parents/carers and their babies aged 0-12. The group is a welcoming space to help promote knowledge of your child's development and an opportunity to take part in activities where you can form strong attachments and bonds with your baby.**

When families sign up to Baby-Start they can expect to be given a warm welcome on arrival at the venue and help to settle at the group with introductions and refreshments. There is space for social distancing within our groups and the group becomes a social bubble for the duration.

The sessions run for 6 weeks with a different topic each week. The activities include sensory treasure, basket making, song time and storytelling.

Each family is provided with resources to take part in the sessions that they are able to keep, such as books, mark making and sensory or small world play toys. Families are encouraged to look back into their own childhoods and share ideas for play and development based on what they already know. Over the 6 weeks, families are able to get to know one another and develop friendships beyond the session.

Baby-Start is a group that is fun, interactive and a space where parents can feel supported, and babies can play and socialise. It can be a great place to meet other families and also for accessing further support with other services, such as signposting to early years services and providers.



### Baby-Start Feedback:

“ The activities are great for parents and babies. It's a brilliant way to socialise, and Hayley is very good at giving ideas of activities to do with the babies at home. ”

“ We loved socialising with the other babies and getting good ideas for sensory activities at home. ”

“ Very relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Great activities for the babies and nice to socialise with other mums. ”

“ All the sessions have been brilliant - interactive, fun and educational, we loved them! ”



## Brunch & Baby

**Is there a better way to meet families to discuss our services than over a cup of tea and a piece of cake?**

Our 'Baby and Brunch Club' has been a massive success so far this year, here at our new premises, as a great way to welcome families who would like to know more about what we do!

The session runs term time each week between 10am and 11am on Wednesday mornings and includes a warm welcome, refreshments and a short story for the babies and song time at the end. The session is a 'drop in' and creates a relaxed environment for families to form friendships and social groups as well as access to our more tailored services.

The Brunch session has been great as a platform to meet families who have gone on to attend Baby Massage, Baby-Start, Paediatric First Aid and most recently Tuning in to Kids.

We very much welcome HV's and other local service providers, to drop in or signpost families to us who are experiencing isolation or who are in need of friendship and services.

The group has also helped families who are supported by Home-Start volunteers, with babies 0-12, to access a space where they can socialise with their babies and gain confidence and increase opportunity for positive change.

Other aspects of the session have been the incredible peer support the families have shown one another in relation to infant developmental milestones, candid advice on returning to work, local childcare availability and signposting to other activities for families, such as swimming, days out and shops offering good quality preloved baby and children's clothes and equipment.

The Brunch and Baby Club has enabled many families to access us through what is initially a universal group, and to then move on to structured sessions, led by our coordinators or to self-refer for a volunteer should they have a need for increased support during these precious, but often difficult, early years.

Mmmm!

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**For more information please  
text: Hayley at Home-Start  
West Somerset on  
07483 123653**





## Shine

**SHINE is a monthly group for parents of children with special educational needs up to 9 years old – an opportunity to come together to share experiences and information. SHINE currently supports 24 West Somerset families and has a range of visiting professionals, speakers, and support agencies who share their professional information with parents. During each session, SHINE delivers a series of activities to promote the well-being of children and parents.**

### Targets (T) & Outcomes (O):

**T:** Families of children experiencing issues around communication, behaviour and/or SEND are able to access a local support group, meeting other families and a range of professionals and support agencies.

**O:** *Group established for families and 24 families have joined the sessions*

**T:** Families develop awareness of opportunities for their children in the local area in terms of activity and experiences.

**O:** *Through provision map sharing and discussion with visiting speakers and other parents/carers – for example CIAT joined one session and, as a result of discussions with families regarding the lack of supported holiday opportunities in West Somerset, have arranged activity in West Somerset.*

**T:** Families and children are supported to join local activities and experiences.

**O:** *For example, families aware of provision at Minehead Eye, monthly group being run at The Hub and other CIAT opportunities.*

**T:** Families have a voice as parents of children with SEND in West Somerset.

**O:** *A number of parents were interested in and joined Somerset Parent Carer Forum which will allow a greater voice for West Somerset.*

**T:** The skills and confidence of families in supporting their children is increased.

**O:** *See quotes from parent/carers below. Also held sessions around communication and communication support e.g. visuals, Inclusive Communication signing, social stories ...*

**T:** The well-being of families is supported.

**O:** *A number of activities and experiences have been provided for parents/carers to support emotional well-being: hand massage and care, cooking, crafts, crochet, bird box making... The creche facility has enabled focus on these activities. One parent commented that it was the first time for a long time that she had been able to sit and relax and do something for herself.*

### One thing I truly enjoyed about Shine was ...





## Full Tummies

**In June we held 2 pilot sessions for Full Tummies. The aim of these sessions was to encourage and enable parents to cook simple recipes with their children in our fully kitted out kitchen (thanks to funding from the West Somerset Opportunity Area). We collaborated with Rebecca Edwards who runs the Little Fishes parent and toddler group.**

We discovered lots of different ways to create a pizza with a variety of toppings and bases, we even discovered a pizza sauce with hidden vegetables! Both children and parents got hands on with the cooking and had some new food experiences.

The children had great fun with some craft and playtime whilst their creations were cooking. The best part of all was the taste test and getting to take their pizza's home to share with the rest of the family. Families were also given recipe cards and packs to take home.

In week 2 we discovered how to make simple savoury muffins, again with a wide choice of fillings. Once again everyone had great fun and produced a great selection to take home. It was also great to hear families chatting and sharing money saving tips on food shopping and recipes.

### Families who joined us said:

*"My child really enjoys the cooking and couldn't wait to come again today!"*

*"It's a great opportunity to do something different with my child and meet other families too."*

Both sessions were very successful, and it was agreed that this is a project we would like to take forward in September. **Watch this space...**

### For more information please contact:

**Home-Start West Somerset on 01643 707304**

**E: [admin@homestart-westsomerset.org.uk](mailto:admin@homestart-westsomerset.org.uk)**



## Tots Talking

**Tots Talking is a chance for parents of two-year-olds to come along to a group with other local parents to find out more about how their toddlers are learning to talk.**

Tots Talking is a specially designed programme for parents who need that support and network to help their child with language development.

In each session there are videos, information, and a chance to make a toy or activity that they can do at home with their child in between the sessions.

Parents who've come before have told us that it's been fun and that it's given them some great ideas for playing and talking with their children.

**For more information please contact:  
Carol Morris at Home-Start West Somerset  
T: 01643 707304 M: 07376 809976**

**Do you want  
to know...**

How you can help  
your two year old with  
talking and learning?

What helps children  
do well at nursery  
and school?

How children learn  
to communicate  
and behave?



## Dad Matters



*to mum, to baby, to everyone...*

So often dads are left out or seen as an afterthought, but dads are also involved in raising children. Times are changing and that needs to be reflected in the support that's available to dads. Home-Start West Somerset wanted to be able to help new dads and felt the project Dad Matters complimented the already successful Bump-Start project.

There's still this image of dad as the breadwinner but over the years, dads have become much more involved in family life. Of course this is great. But services haven't kept up, so there's little support focused on dads. "Dads attend antenatal groups, where they were helped to prepare for the birth, but once the baby was born they were largely left to their own devices". Many dads

told us they were struggling to be involved and help their partners with their baby and wanted some support but didn't feel the existing baby groups worked for them.

As we all know there's no manual with children. Dad Matters aims to encourage dads to chat about different aspects of parenting. For instance, ideas to help nurture their relationships with their children and the importance of communication and play.

We might talk about a traumatic birth experience, or the challenges in looking after young children. Regardless of what is discussed, dads are able to build up connections. By supporting dads in this way we are helping them to create the best possible environment to raise healthy and happy children.



Charlie Hull, Dad Matters Coordinator:

***"Dad Matters is a new county wide service offering support and advice to new Dads in Somerset, enabling small group discussions and mentoring; whether in person, phone or online. We are part of the Home-Start charity, and work closely with them to offer bespoke sign-posting for all matters related to babies, infants and families. We are particularly keen to tackle any lingering sense of isolation or fear that new Dads may be feeling, and believe that establishing small, mutually supportive local new-Dads networks is the best way to tackle this. I live in a village just outside Somerton with two college-aged children, very much in the middle of the county. Please do get in touch if you'd like to know more."***



Charlie Hull attending the Dads Matter Convention in Bolton



***"Talking and sharing experiences with other dads helped my mental wellbeing. Dad Matters provides a place where you can vent about the challenges of looking after a child. Without it life would have been much more difficult, and I'd have felt quite lonely. My ability to be a good dad is strengthened by attending Dad Matters."***

Dad Matters Dad





## How do I do skin-skin?

- Get comfy, with your arms and back supported, as you could be sitting or lying a while.
- Get baby on your bare chest in just their nappy and cover them with a blanket to keep them warm.
- Hold your baby close, supporting them with both hands.
- Take note of how your baby responds to you, and how they react to things around them.

## Babies Cry – You Can Cope

Crying is one of the many ways your baby communicates and it's an opportunity to think about what their behaviour is telling you...

**I – Infant crying is normal**

**C – Comforting methods can help**

**O – It's OK to walk away**

**N – Never, ever shake a baby**

Speak to someone if you need support such as your family, friends, peer supporter, Midwife, GP or Health Visitor



“ You're the first person I've spoken to about this and it feels good to be able to talk ”

## Other Useful Resources

### NHS Choice

*Depression and anxiety self-assessment quiz*

### ICON – iconcope.org

*Babies cry, you can cope*

### CRY-SIS – 08451 228669

*National helpline*

### BASIS – basisonline.org.uk

*Baby sleep info source*

### Dad Pad – thedadpad.co.uk/app

*A useful app for dads*

### Baby Buddy App – bestbeginnings.org.uk/baby-buddy

### Refuge – 0808 801 0327

*Men's advice line*

### Shout – 24/7 text SHOUT to 85258

*Text support*

### The Samaritans – 116 123

### Mind – 0300 123 3393

### Calm – thecalmzone.net



*Scan me!*



*Follow us on social media to keep up to date*

*For more information, please get in touch:*

### Charlie Hull

Local Dad Matters Coordinator

w: dadmatters.org.uk

t: 07483 123652 (Mobile)

e: charlie.dadmatters@homestart-westsomerset.org.uk



*to mum, to baby, to everyone...*

Supporting dads to have the  
best possible relationships  
with their families



dadmatters.org.uk

HOMESTART



# Dear Dad,

This information is for:

If you have any questions or concerns about yours or your child's well-being, please contact me on:

**07483 123652 (Mobile)**  
**charlie.dadmatters@homestart-westsomerset.org.uk**

This leaflet contains information to support you to have the best possible relationship with your family.

You will find tips on bonding with your new baby and why this is so important.

You'll also find signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression in new dads and who you can contact if you have any questions or concerns.

“ You helped more than you will know and got me through a really tough time ”

Who can I contact if I am worried about my relationship with my baby, or my own well-being?

**dadmatters.org.uk**

Your Midwife, Health Visitor or GP,  
Adult Mental Health Services (IAPT) or  
Parent Infant Services (referral needed)

## How can I bond with my new baby?

- Some men find bonding with their baby difficult, but **you don't have to wait until they are born to start!**
- Babies can hear in the womb from about the 18<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy. Try talking, singing and reading to your baby, before and after they are born.
- If it feels a bit awkward, try playing your baby your favourite songs, telling them about your hobbies, your work or your ambitions for their future.
- Skin to skin also increases yours and your baby's levels of the hormone oxytocin, which promotes bonding and attachment.
- Carrying your baby in your arms or a sling/carrier can also help you to learn their cues and become more reactive to their signals, helping you to get to know them better.

## How can I help my baby's brain development?

- Baby's parents help them build their brain into a strong and stable blueprint for the future.
- Your baby's brain wiring (neural pathways) is around 20% connected when they are born.
- How well that wiring develops can affect the way they communicate, handle problems and how they learn.
- It can also impact their relationships and physical and emotional health when they become adults.
- Consistent, positive and loving relationships help your baby's brain to grow and lower the effects of stress.
- Babies are primed to look for two way interaction with their care givers, including touch, facial expressions and conversation. When you respond to their cues, you are literally helping them to build positive brain connections.
- Responding to your baby, especially when they are upset or sick, and providing them with a safe, supportive and loving relationship is also important.

## Why is my mental health and well-being so important for my baby?

When a parent experiences poor mental health it can affect the way they respond to, bond with and care for their child. This can impact the child's psychological, intellectual, social and emotional development.

## What is the likelihood of developing mental health issues as a new dad?

In England, *1 in 8 men* experience depression, anxiety, panic disorders or obsessive compulsive disorder.

Postnatal depression affects *1 in 10 dads*.

Peak time for men to develop postnatal depression is *3-6 months* following the birth, but symptoms can come on anytime in the first few years of being dad.

*Signs to look for can include one or more of:*

- Insomnia
- Fear/panic
- Confusion
- Feelings of helplessness
- Uncertainty about the future
- Withdrawal from family life, work and social events
- Indecisiveness
- Greater risk taking
- Frustration/anger
- Irritability
- Cynicism
- Negative parenting behaviours
- Increased alcohol use
- Drug use
- Partner conflict
- Loss of interest in sex or erectile dysfunction
- Physical symptoms like headaches, nausea, indigestion, changes in appetite and weight, diarrhea, constipation and toothaches



## Tuning into Kids

### Emotionally intelligent parenting

**The aim of the Tuning into Kids course is to help parents develop emotion coaching skills with their children and to increase participants awareness of the importance of their own emotion awareness and regulation.**

The course is delivered in a small group and broken down over six sessions. We aim to deliver it in a friendly and engaging environment in our training room at Alcombe Children's Centre.

There is always a warm welcome and best of all refreshments during the sessions! The course really helps parents to connect with their children's emotions which can have a huge impact on behaviour and future outcomes throughout life. We also talk and learn about parents' wellbeing and mindfulness as this can also have a big impact on how we cope with the sometimes tough times of parenting.

We offer a lending library of books with a theme of understanding emotions for parents to read with their child and lots of resources to take home and keep each week. We also investigate the science behind what goes on in our emotional brains and how to recognise what helps to calm a child who has flipped their lid!

#### Parents from our recent Tuning into Kids sessions said:

*"Since participating in the programme, I've noticed both of my kids speaking about their emotions more and understanding why and when they are angry"*

*"The course helped me to not only understand my child's emotions but mine as well. It helped me to understand how to talk to my children easier and to help them understand their emotions."*

*"All emotions are ok, it's how we deal that matters"*

*"The course has definitely helped, my child can now recognise his emotions better, we talk about feelings more and have learnt to be calmer and talk about what's going on"*

**For more information on the course and to register your interest please contact: Vicky at Home-Start West Somerset on**  
**E: [vicky@homestart-westsomerset.org.uk](mailto:vicky@homestart-westsomerset.org.uk)**  
**T: 01643 707304 or**  
**M: 07483 123655**





## Case Study: Irina's Story

**Home-Start volunteers offer practical and emotional support through home visits, activities with the families, phone calls and texts often visiting once or twice a week.**

Irina, Mum of Lucas and Rebecca, came to us in September 2021. As a Family Support Co-ordinator, I chatted with Irina about what type of support she needed and how we could help.

Irina and her husband originate from Romania and are bilingual however her eldest child, Lucas, was struggling to pick up the English language. He was finding settling into nursery very scary as he could not understand what was being said to and around him. This must have felt very lonely and confusing for him. This was both upsetting and stressful for the family. They were also struggling with some housing issues and the cost of living.

The family agreed that support from one of our volunteers would be very helpful and the family were quickly matched with the one of our trained Home-Start Volunteers, Lisa.

Lisa started visiting the family in October 2021. We also worked together with the team at nursery to ensure we were consistent in our approach to help Lucas. Lisa visited the family weekly, sometimes at home and sometimes in the park. She helped Lucas to learn through lots of rhymes, singing, games, books and fun activities. Through this joint support, Lucas soon picked up many English words and phrases, even an English

accent! He became more and more comfortable and was soon confident enough to stay at nursery sessions without Mum.

As a coordinator I supported Irina with her phone calls for housing, food boxes and baby supplies as well as collaborating with our volunteer and the nursery. We kept in touch regularly and I also visited the family many times.

The family are now settled in a new home and Lucas is enjoying nursery. The family keep in touch and attend craft sessions in the holidays with us.



**Irina said:**

“Having help from Home-Start was amazing, I was so happy! Lucas was always excited about her visit and enjoyed all the activities.”

**Lisa said:**

“It was an absolute delight to be asked to support this family and with my early years' experience, I was able to support Lucas with his English skills. We played lots of games, read books and played in the park using lots of language in our activities. It was great to see and hear how happy the family were to see me each week. It was easy to see the progress Lucas was making and the difference it was making for the family in so many ways. Seeing how happy Mum was with the support too, just being there to help was often enough!”



## Volunteers

**It's often said that our amazing volunteers are the heart of Home-Start West Somerset. Its thanks to them we're such an effective charity. We reach families through our volunteers so our investment in them is critical to our ability to support families.**

Many of the parents Home-Start support go on to become volunteers themselves, and recently Nessie became a Home-Start volunteer, having the opportunity to support another family has further built her own confidence and belief in herself by showing what Nessie is capable of.



Lynette (Nessie) Watson

Nessie quotes:

***"I am so excited to become a Home-Start volunteer, to be able to move forward to a better place and become an important part of Home-Start in which I can help other families means so much to me. Home-Start was a big part of my own recovery and provided a lot of support at the time, and a few years later I was able to be in a place that, by volunteering, I could help someone as I was helped. Being able to help people is such a privileged position to be in, I'm now helping a wonderful family. Home-Start is such an important charity, I don't know what would have happened to me if there was no Home-Start. Over the years I've gone through a lot, but that experience helps me empathise and relate to families who themselves are going through difficulties."***

The majority of families receiving support from us benefit from our home-visiting volunteers, who regularly meet with their family at home. This includes practical support and resources, emotional support for parents, and activities involving children in the family. In addition to this core home-visiting support, we also provide further opportunities and parental engagement through our own group sessions and access to services such as outreach in to antenatal settings, infant feeding support, or a range of evidence-based school-readiness and parenting programmes. Alongside other local services, we work together to meet the needs of the local communities, supporters and – most importantly of all – the families they serve. The importance of relationships has been demonstrated in so many ways during the recent pandemic, and the realities and possibilities for connection have been turned upside down. Home-Start West Somerset and its volunteers have risen to this challenge to continue to develop and make connections with parents in need. Our volunteers and staff have done this by sharing time, kindness, practical help, compassion, generosity and vital moments of fun with families in these difficult times. These are our founding qualities and values and they have served us well.



### Photos of our newly trained volunteers



Caroline Sharman



Catherine Shepherd



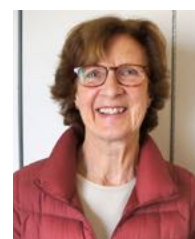
Kirsty Bohun



June Harris



Linda Dibble



Pippa Prideaux









## Story-Start

*"I first began doing a Story-Start session at Porlock Community Baby and Toddler Group about 4 years ago. The reason I wanted to volunteer to run the Story-Start session is because I believe passionately in the power of storytelling to engage and motivate children to enjoy learning from the very earliest stage of their development."*

*Story-Start enables me to share my love and enthusiasm for books, stories and rhymes with babies, young children and their parents. They can enjoy listening to a story and also have a chance to browse the books provided by Story-Start which can be freely shared, borrowed and discussed with myself and other parents in the group.*

*It has been a pleasure to build up relationships with the families in the group and to get to know them as they have had new babies. It is a particular joy to watch the toddlers I have known for a few years rush to look at the books I bring when I come in. Some of them will also bring favourite books in for me to share with them.*

*During the pandemic I was able to support one of the mums in the group who started up a Free Library outside her home in Porlock. Story-Start helped by supplying books and home activities packs for local young families. Many of them told me how much they appreciated that during the period of isolation in lockdown."*

Catherine Rayner, Volunteer



### Story-Start Feedback:

“ My child looks forward to seeing Cathy and finding out which books she has brought to toddler group. He loves engaging with her and the stories she shares with us. ”

“ We really have loved having Cathy come and read to us, all 3 of my little ones really enjoy getting involved. She makes it so that it's interesting and fun for all the ages, we look forward to seeing her again after the holidays. ”

“ We love coming to the Story-Start Sessions at our local Toddler group, having access to a brilliant variety of books, there's always something for each of my children. Cathy is engaging and the children love sitting and listening to her story telling. ”



## Outreach Learning Together Coordinator

At the beginning of 2022 Home-Start West Somerset wanted to create a way of reaching out and helping further families more directly by working alongside with established outreach play groups that are already set up and running and provide them with a structured helpful parenting programme of resources, information and advice, and to upskill group leads and support their learning in running a group.

So, with successful funding from the West Somerset Opportunity Area, we recruited Denise as Learning Together Outreach Coordinator who has been responsible for:

- Working in partnership with West Somerset baby and toddler groups to support families with early years learning and development
- Facilitating early years experts to visit and share information at the groups.
- Providing resources to the groups and where possible to individual families that promote early learning opportunities and building secure attachment to caregivers.
- Supporting families and signpost to relevant services and opportunities in West Somerset.



Denise reports ***“We have had some lovely sessions with really positive feedback. I’ve had great conversations with parents and have enjoyed leading group activities with the children and their parents. This project has been really welcomed by parents as it is a simple but very effective support service, by going directly to these families with all our resources, information and advice has been really appreciated.”***

Denise visited...

**14**

outreach  
playgroups  
across West  
Somerset

Denise reached...

**182**

families



Denise met with...

**267**

children



### Outreach Learning Feedback:

**“ We love having Denise in our group. She is fantastic with the children and adults too. ”**

**“ Working with Denise has been a useful partnership with both of us linking parents to the other as needed. At the end of the session we talk through some of the presented problems so Denise is able to build her own knowledge of ideas she can share with parents after I finish. ”**

**“ The project has gone really well, Denise is AMAZING! ”**

**“ More aware of how my child’s speech might develop, and what I can do to help him. ”**

**“ Great to have access to a speech therapist as my child’s appointment isn’t for 6 months. ”**

**“ It’s something that families really need in this area. ”**



## Case Study: Lada and Sasha's Story

One of the most courageous stories I have heard as a family support coordinator this year has been that of the single mother from Ukraine and her 3 year old daughter. We matched mum and daughter with one of our most energetic volunteers. This incredible mother who is of very slight frame, but huge determination, left her life – her job, friends and home – overnight in her city in Ukraine when the bombs were landing. Taking her daughter and packing only their essentials they walked to Poland in a huge crowd of other fleeing women and children. It took many days and this mother carried not only their few belongings, but also her exhausted child to safety. In Poland she stayed with an old university acquaintance and practiced her English to be ready to join our Homes for Ukraine's Scheme.

Upon meeting this incredible Ukrainian women I was blown away by her questions about how to start her child at nursery, how to find work and care for themselves. When we first met she described her old life and shared the exhaustion from travelling and trauma of it all. When the planes fly over head from the coast here, she still flinches and describes the fear of war.

Following the match visit with her volunteer, she said ***'I wasn't sure we could do this, but now I've met you, everything seems possible'***. We feel hugely privileged to be a part of their journey.

The ongoing plan is to help this family integrate in the community and take part in activities and events over the summer, as well joining up with other Ukrainian groups and information schemes running across the wider area. This tiny family's main hopes are to build supportive friendships, find work, eventually housing and access quality early years education for her child. With Home-Start and the friendship of her volunteer we believe she can achieve anything!



**Above: Sarah (Volunteer)**  
**Left: Sasha painting**

**“ I wasn't sure we could do this, but now I've met you, everything seems possible. ”**





## Volunteer's Report

*"When the news broke of the terrible war on the people of the Ukraine my heart sank. What could I do? So like many I donated money, collected items for the local drivers taking supplies to Poland and I watched the news in the hope that this would end soon.*

*So when I was asked by Hayley to be the volunteer for a family who had arrived from the Ukraine I was both delighted and honoured. At last I could do just a little bit more.*

*I met Lada and her 3 year old daughter on sunny morning in August 2022 at their host families home. Sasha was lively and fun and Lada was, and is, a pleasure to spend time with. Despite the fact that at 3 Sasha has only 2 or 3 words of English and I of course have no Ukrainian we just laughed and played for the next two hours.*

*Lada is a hard working professional woman who left Ukraine to offer her daughter a place of safety. She asks for little but asks a lot of questions; 'how do I find work, how is it possible to end up having my own home and why do the English drink so much tea'?*

*I have supported them with GP appointments, sourcing familiar foods, and finding local activities for her beautiful daughter Sasha to be involved in.*

*Thank goodness for West Somerset offering so many amazing and free activities over the summer holidays. We are off to East Quay to join in the free art sessions and seeing what Party in the Park is all about over the weekend. But, I feel more helpful has been exploring the local area of Williton and finding out what's on the doorstep. Who knew that the local library would be a place that I saw Mother and Daughter relax, laugh, chatter and just be content in the cool, book filled Emporium that is a Great British Library.*

*Lada says that the support she has received has already been fantastic and she is surprised by how kind we are to help her on her journey.*

*We all look forward to many hours together on our continued exploration of Somerset."*



## Case Study: The Davis Family

The Davis family moved into social housing in a remote Exmoor village. They had no family locally and do not know the area. They felt isolated and were struggling with the eldest child's behaviour. Mum lacked confidence and didn't like going out on her own. We placed a volunteer to help mum get out with their two small children and to offer support and advice on Tommy's behaviour.

Tommy joined our School Start programme where we supported families in lockdown with children starting school in September. He enjoyed the activities, mum and dad enjoyed meeting other adults in a Covid safe environment. We were able to give the family tailored activities to carry on at home to help Tommy get ready for school.

In October the family joined our monthly Shine group for parents of children with special educational needs, to access further advice on supporting Tommy.

We referred the family to The Get West Somerset Moving Scheme, run by the Community Council for Somerset and the family received a car which meant dad could start training for an IT qualification after accessing a job centre training programme.

We closed support for the family at the start of summer this year. Mum is working in the village and dad is working towards IT qualifications. Tommy is doing well at school and the family are following their volunteers advice on supporting him at home. The family feel part of their community and want to stay in the area.



## Events

### Plant Stall

There is a huge plant sale plot in Quay Lane with a most generous gardener called Judith, this lady has raised thousands of pounds for Home-Start West Somerset over the past few years and we have no way to thank her enough. But we'd like Judith to know that we are incredibly grateful for all her hard work and kindness to Home-Start West Somerset.



### Quiz Evening

From Tony... ***“Just to let you know that the grand total raised for Home-Start at our Quiz Evening was £567 (combined entrance fees and raffle money). A fantastic amount, thanks to everyone who contributed via donations and ‘on the ground’ help.***

***Extra special thanks to Liz for her absolutely sterling work at setting and presenting questions... a tricky audience situation at times! Sincere thanks also to Ros and Catherine for calmly keeping the scores under a fair bit of pressure.***

***The evening was a great success, especially given that we were hoping for 10-12 teams to turn up when, in fact, we actually had 22 teams... 130 people. Unfortunately we had to turn several people away because we ran out of tables and chairs!”***



**Top Left to Right: Judith at the Plant Sale, Quiz Evening & Volunteer Cathy**

**Middle Left to Right: Easter Bingo and ‘The Move’** – we moved offices to Alcombe Children Centre which has proven to be an excellent venue allowing Home-Start to provide a greater service to local families. Special thanks to Simon and his team at AR Computing.

**Bottom Left: Oscar making his presence on the BT Tower**



## Kite: Building Back Together

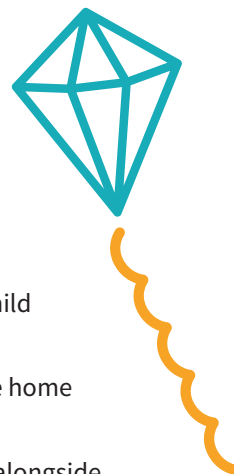


The range of services and systems available to families is broad, often fragmented and variable. Given the range of services and contexts involved in promoting positive outcomes for children, there was an urgent need for an integrated approach, and a clear and accountable leadership if we were to stand any chance of “levelling up” the opportunities for all families.

In the past year Home-Start West Somerset and Minehead Eye have recognised this and collaborated together to create KITE, an overarching strategy that will provide families in West Somerset a one stop hub provision for families to access support services. Identifying other organisations in the community to work together to develop KITE as trusted organisations and the voluntary sector to further the positive impact for families across West Somerset with a seamless transition of families to various groups that best meet their evolving needs.

Our shared priorities that should shape family support and early help services within KITE broadly speaking, include:

- Early help: Recognising the utility in prevention and early intervention to support families who find themselves struggling.
- Integrated approaches: Moving towards establishing integrated systems for commissioning and delivering services.
- Focusing on wellbeing: In particular on improving access to perinatal, infant and child mental health services.
- Focusing on the outcomes gaps: In particular on the role of early education and the home environment in relation to social mobility.
- A parent-powered approach: Family support should be re-designed and improved alongside people in a holistic way, over time, listening carefully to the strengths and assets of families and communities to harness the experience, knowledge and skills of parents and caregivers in communities.





## A special thank you to our many funders and donators for their financial support in making a huge difference to West Somerset families

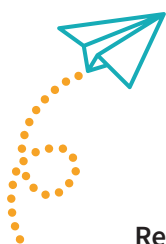


Somerset County Council  
Somerset West & Taunton Council  
West Somerset Opportunity Area  
Lottery Community Fund  
Somerset Community Foundation  
Somerset West lottery  
Easyfundraising  
Dorothy Whitney Elmhurst Trust  
Amazon Smile  
Judith's Plant sale  
Cutcombe Christmas Fatstock Show  
Morrisons

Tesco  
Magical Thinking Jewellery  
Blueberry  
Co-op Local Community Fund  
Washford Inn  
FRIENDS of Home-Start West Somerset  
Masons  
Poppins  
The Balmain Environment  
Conservation Trust  
Sherborne Castle Country Fair

We need to thank all the lovely people that knit, sew blankets and toys for our families.

And a special thanks to our wonderful team of local Home-Start West Somerset fundraisers who have raised huge monies from plant stalls, book sales, quizzes, attending local fetes and shows, I spy events, Bingo, live music gig, the Upper Room sales plus many more. You have all been brilliant, thank you!



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