



2002-2023

HOME  
START

West Somerset

*Because childhood can't wait.*

# Annual Review

Sept 2022 - Sept 2023



We are a local family support charity 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.**

## About Home-Start West Somerset

### Our Mission

Home-Start West Somerset 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 West Somerset'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.



### The Home-Start West Somerset Approach

Home-Start works in a different way to many statutory and other services because families invite us into their homes and lives. We form relationships with families so that our peer volunteers and expert staff can offer non-judgemental, compassionate, confidential help. Recognising the importance of the early years of a child's life, we focus on families with children under the age of five. In 2023, we asked families what makes a difference for them, and they highlighted a range of practical and emotional ways that we support them:

kindness and  
friendship

accessible  
for all

really helpful and  
making sure the kids  
have what they need

no judgement

There is strong evidence for the value of preventative, peer-led support for families in the early years. The particular value of the role of the volunteer is made clear in supporting families who may otherwise not receive, or be wary of, support from statutory services.



“ I am so grateful to be working with my Home-Start partners. The collaborative working is so beneficial to the families I work with, and I can see the difference the service makes. For me Home-Start is my first go-to place when I want to support a family in need. ”

Response from a Health Visitor 2023

#### 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.

## Why It Matters

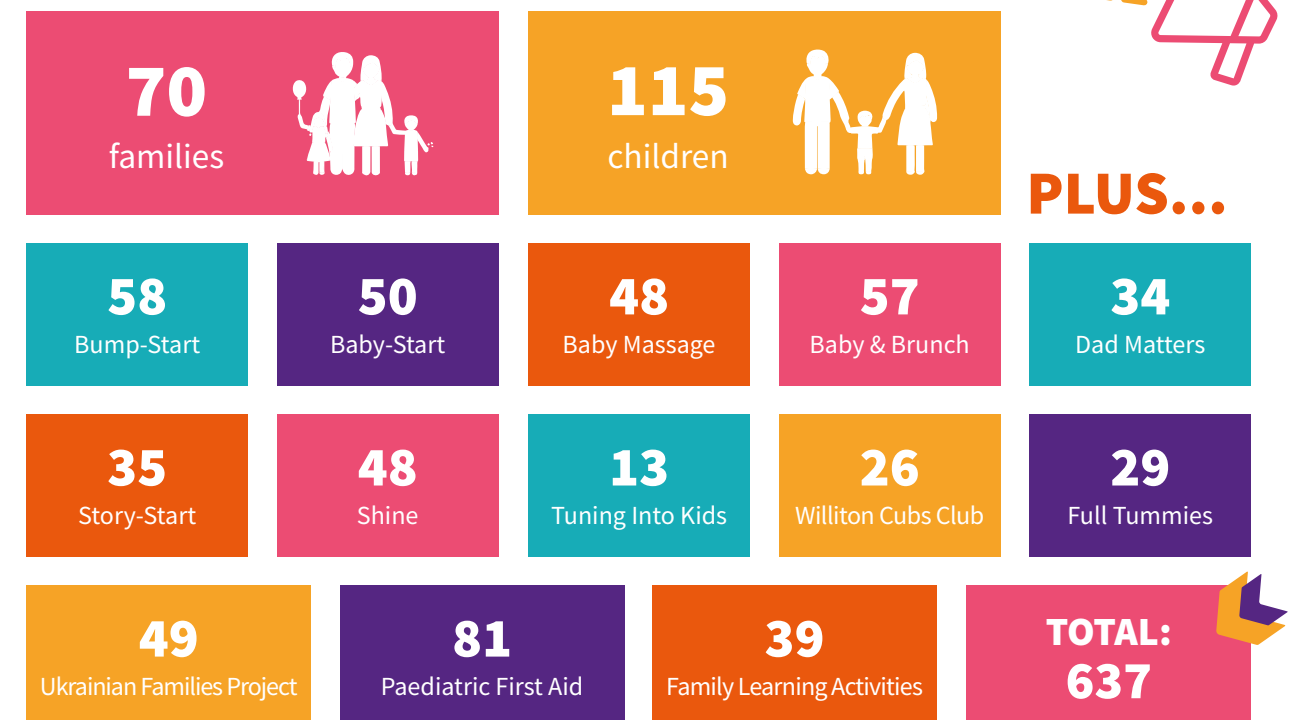
The start of a child's life, beginning with pregnancy, lays the foundations for future physical and mental health. Babies' brains develop rapidly and are at their most adaptable in the earliest years of life. These years are full of challenge and opportunity, vulnerability and growth. To give children the best start in life requires nurturing relationships, an enriching home environment and parents who are supported to fulfil this essential role. Young children develop within the context of relationships, where strong attachments with loving caregivers underpin their early development and can act as a buffer against adversity. Socio-economic factors particularly have a stronger influence on younger children's health outcomes than those of older children, suggesting that families' circumstances are crucial in the years before school. When families find themselves vulnerable, stretched, or isolated they will benefit from support to help them realise and build on their strengths. Our core model of volunteer-led home-visiting support is provided alongside a wide range of projects, activities, group support and more targeted support. This allows us to work responsively with parents to meet a range of needs.

Home-Start West Somerset's work seeks to build upon parents' strengths, to empower them and their families to move forward. A trusted relationship between parent and volunteer, starting in the home, is one of the key elements of our practice that enables people to feel more comfortable about asking for help and to feel less judged by others.

Our volunteers and staff are effectively trained, supported and equipped to provide practical and emotional support that's tailored to each family. Staff and volunteers offer consistent contact with families, often visiting homes once or twice a week over many months, enabling trusted relationships to form with parents and children. This informed, responsive support enables Home-Start to harness the experience, knowledge and skills that are rooted in communities, other parents and caregivers.

The Home-Start approach and our roots in communities mean that we are particularly well placed to reach and support families facing challenges or experiencing distress, for example through disability, poverty, poor physical or mental health, isolation, or a relationship breakdown.

### 2022-2023: Home-Start West Somerset supported families with home visiting volunteers:



# Bump-Start

## Antenatal sessions

### Becoming a parent can be both exciting and challenging.

At Bump-Start, we understand the mixed emotions parents may be feeling. That's why our Antenatal Real Birth Workshop sessions are designed to help promote a positive birth experience. We aim to impart knowledge to empower women and their birth partners with confidence at this very special time, by providing insight into the birthing process as a normal function of the human body. We aim to also help and support parents with the practical skills, building a support network, so that they feel confident and ready for life with their new baby. 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.

Our Bump-Start support for new parents does not stop at birth, 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. There's a real fear of stigma attached to admitting you're struggling when you have a new baby and asking for help. People often worry about fulfilling the myth of a 'perfect' parent.

We encourage new parents not to go it alone, to join us and take the first step towards a confident and supportive parenting journey.

### Bringing Home Baby

After all the excitement of learning about pregnancy and birth, follows the most challenging bit – coming home with your baby! Our Bringing Home Baby sessions are tailored to answer the questions expectant parents have about life with baby once they come home from hospital. These topics include: *Bathing babies*; *Dressing baby for the weather* (often tricky in the UK!); *Safer Sleep* (you can refer to the Lullaby Trust for useful information on safe sleep practices) and *Baby Wearing* – looking at the different slings and wraps available and what the benefits are of wearing our babies with us (it's more than just having two arms free!).

Bringing Home Baby offers peer support and the opportunity for families to share their tips, ideas and any concerns they have with regard to the practical sides of looking after a baby.

### Post-Natal Drop In Group

**The post-natal drop in group was developed as part of an ongoing initiative to provide good accessible post-natal support and advice to whomever may need it.**

The first few weeks after having a baby are hard; whether it's recovering from birth and the changes to your body, demands on your time, supporting a partner to adjust physically or emotionally, or the sleepless nights and baby care demands; life can become a juggle. We are here to offer a safe space to come and join other new parents, to give you the opportunity to share experiences, tips or just to meet new people and form friendships. The group started at the beginning of this year and is ever evolving depending on whatever kind of support is needed. We have had sessions previously discussing infant feeding, bonding with baby, birthing experience, and other times it has just been nice to chat with a hot drink and a slice of cake! The post-natal group is not exclusive to first time parents, we encourage anybody wanting to join us in those first few weeks and months after birth. Sometimes expectant parents have come in to see us after their ante-natal classes in the last few weeks of their pregnancy; this is also a great opportunity to ask any parents questions whilst their experiences are so recent.

## Baby Massage

Home-Start West Somerset's baby massage programme is well-respected, well-researched and is endorsed to be a high-quality parent education programme by the International Association of Infant Massage (IAIM) which is a global organisation and world-class standard for the training and teaching of baby massage. Home-Start West Somerset's IAIM baby massage course offers a wonderful opportunity for parents to learn how to communicate with their baby through nurturing touch and massage in a relaxed and welcoming environment.

### What is Baby Massage?

Baby massage is when a parent or primary carer lovingly strokes or holds their baby. Using a high quality non-fragranced vegetable oil, soothing holds and rhythmic strokes are given on each area of baby's body, following a sequence that has been developed over many years. The massage offers a wonderful experience and a special time to communicate both verbally and non-verbally with babies, so that they feel loved, valued and respected.

Our IAIM baby massage course draws from both the Indian and Swedish massage traditions, as well as incorporating principles from yoga and reflexology.

### The Benefits of Baby Massage

Many parents have already attended our courses and discovered the numerous benefits of baby massage which can include:

#### For Baby...

- Helping your baby to feel securely attached
- Helping your baby to feel more loved, valued and respected
- Reduced crying and emotional distress
- Increased levels of relaxation and longer sleep
- Development of body awareness and coordination
- Relief from wind, colic, constipation and teething discomfort

#### For you...

- Feeling closer to your baby
- Gaining a deeper understanding of your baby's behaviour, crying and body language
- Providing an enjoyable opportunity to spend one-to-one time with your baby
- Feeling the relaxing effects of giving your baby a massage
- Increased confidence in your ability to care for and nurture your baby
- Learning a life-long parenting skill

“It was so lovely to go through the whole birth journey, from antenatal to baby massage, it's so relaxed and has given us all lots of confidence.”

Jenni, Steve & Baby Sebastian

“It was so good for bonding, great to get out of the house, we really enjoyed it and are using the techniques at home.”

Jess & Baby Emily

See our Baby Massage photos on Pages 12 & 13!





## Baby-Start

**Baby-Start is a practitioner led baby group for parents/carers and their babies aged 0-12 months. 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.

Baby-Start is a structured 6 weeks of sessions with topics around songs, stories, treasure baskets and early years maths for a maximum of 6 families. This size of group helps to develop friendships and peer support for families with babies aged 0-12 months, across the area.

Each family is provided with resources that they are able to keep to take part in the sessions, 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 and interactive. It provides 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.

“It has been a very exciting time for home-grown group Baby-Start, as it was showcased at the Home-Start UK conference in Plymouth. We were extremely proud to share how we developed the programme and the benefits of the content for babies and families in West Somerset. It was a delight to share the positive impact of a structured group for families to attend, where the parent was aided with different themes and topics, to become their baby's first educator.

Since April 2023 we now run Baby-Start sessions back-to-back between our base at Alcombe Children's Centre, Williton Children Centre and the beautiful Sanctuary in Watchet. This enables the sessions to be delivered to 12 families each half term and the opportunity for 72 families per year to access Baby-Start, which is up from 36 families the year before.

Since staff training with Montessori, Baby-Start has additional content included in the programme to increase knowledge of baby development and opportunities for extending learning and fun for families.”

Hayley, Baby-Start Coordinator

For more information please contact  
Local Baby-Start Coordinator Hayley Williams  
01643 707304 / 07843 123653 or email:  
hayley@homestart-westsomerset.org.uk



## Baby & Brunch

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

Hayley is the Baby-Start lead for Home-Start West Somerset and also runs the Baby & Brunch sessions – her background is in Early Years and Family Support.

At Home-Start we love meeting so many families at the start of their parenting journey, and watching their babies develop during their time accessing Home-Start. It is a real privilege to be a part of a family's story and their positive beginnings and absolute wonder at their child.

Hayley is described in the team as 'a bit of a Mrs Tumble' and enjoys group delivery with active participation to get families involved in their baby's development and sharing knowledge of early years development and strategies of reflective parenting. She smiles a lot and has a loud laugh!

The Baby & Brunch sessions run during term time, every week between 10am and 11am on Wednesday mornings. It includes a warm welcome, refreshments, a short story and song time for the babies 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 and we very much welcome Health Visitor's and other local service providers, to drop in or signpost families to us who are experiencing isolation or who need friendship and services.

The group has also helped families with babies 0-12 months, to access a space where they can socialise with their babies and gain confidence and increase opportunity for positive change.

Another positive aspect of the sessions has been the incredible peer support the families have shown one another. This support has ranged from infant developmental milestones, candid advice on returning to work, local childcare availability and signposting other activities for families, such as swimming, days out and shops offering good quality, preloved baby and children's clothes and equipment.

The Baby & Brunch 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 need increased support during these precious, but often difficult, early years.

For more information  
please contact Hayley  
(see Page 6)





## Shine

**Shine is a support group specifically for parents and carers of children up to the age of 9 with Special Educational Needs. The first Shine group met in September 2021 and the group has been growing in popularity ever since.**

Shine aims to provide information on all aspects of Special Needs and where possible to involve speakers from various support agencies. Parents and carers have opportunities to talk with speakers in order that they can gather information they need around support and interventions for their children.

Our trained professional volunteers provide a fully staffed creche for the children, endeavouring to match activities to interests and needs so that parents and carers are enabled to engage with the speakers, knowing that their children are busy and happy.

Each Shine session also features a well-being focus for parents and carers – an opportunity to create, chat and generally take some time for themselves.

In addition to our volunteers, we are grateful to members of the local community who give their time and expertise to support our activities.

The group runs once a month at Minehead Eye and follows a consistent structure to promote familiarity and security for the children. During the first half of the session, children are encouraged to join the range of activities and experiences provided. This is followed by a snack session which allows the creche area to be reset and have a more sensory focus. Parents and carers join their children for some singing to close the session.

Shine has supported 50 families since inception.



*Sensory fun in the Shine Creche*

## Resource Library

This year saw the launch of our SEND resource library. A library of toys, activities, information and resources specifically relevant to children with SEND.

The library was originally set up to run alongside the CLOWNS toy library at Minehead Eye, but when this facility was no longer available, it was reinstated at The Home-Start offices in Alcombe Children's Centre.

The library has been funded by a charity and also received some funding from the West Somerset Opportunity Area.

There are three main purposes to the library. One is to allow a 'try before you buy' type opportunity to parents, carers and settings who may have been advised that a certain piece of equipment may be helpful to a child. By borrowing the equipment first, its success can be gauged before purchasing for themselves.

Secondly, children can habituate to certain resources, for instance a 'move and sit' cushion – the item may be useful for a few weeks, but then effectiveness wanes. If borrowed from our library, then the cushion can be returned and selected again after a few months when it may again be helpful.



*Sensory Resources*



*Weighted Blankets*



*Sensory Lights*



*Busy Boards*

And finally, one of the main aims, the library provides a varied range of activities and resources that can be changed regularly promoting interest and enjoyment to both child and adult as they explore and play together.

An open afternoon was held to introduce the library to pre-school settings and schools. The local Health Visiting teams and Therapy Services who cover West Somerset have also been made aware of the library in order that they can share the information with the families they work with.

A number of local schools, early years settings and families have signed up so far to borrow resources. Borrowers are asked to complete a registration form, but no charge is made for borrowing items.



*SEN resource library with Carol*

## Events

Having secured funding from Somerset County Council we were able to run two holiday events this year.

Our Easter Fun Day, held at The Hub in Alcombe, was well attended. One parent commented ***"our children haven't stopped; they have had great fun and it's a great atmosphere"***.

Children had access to the soft play area and in addition the main hall was perfect for Bouncy Castle play, creative activities, drink bottle decorating and a range of floor-based resources for younger children.

The smaller room became the sensory area with a dark den, string lights and light up resources for children to explore. It was also a room where children and adults could come and sit quietly as needed.

Lunches were served in the café area.

Children took part in an Easter themed 'hide and seek' activity and were presented with a bag of goodies to take away for the rest of the holiday.

After listening to feedback from parents, we held a 'Summer Safari' as our summer Activity Day.

The day was held at The Tithe barn, Dunster and gave children opportunities to interact with small animals, to get involved in bug hunting, to build bug hotels as well as enjoy water play and other outdoor activities.

Children from all over Somerset joined in with the range of activities.

A company called Zoo'ligans came along with a number of creatures that children could handle, watch and find out about.

Families brought picnics which they were able to enjoy outside in the sunshine and the sunny weather meant that water play excesses were soon dried up!

Shine continues to support children with SEND and their families, as one small person said at our Summer Safari ***"This is my best week!"***.



*A super bug hotel*



*All you need is a bucket of water and some paint brushes!*





# Full Tummies – Cooking Workshops

Full Tummies has been a popular workshop over the past year. These sessions are for parents and children and are held in our fully equipped kitchen here at the Children’s Centre.

Each family is offered 4 sessions where they learn new cooking skills, food budgeting tips and how to make the most of ingredients and oven space which is very helpful in the current financial climate! It also provides a great opportunity to socialise with other families in a relaxed and friendly environment.

The children are encouraged to take part in the cooking. We also run a creche facility in our training room to allow freedom of choice during the sessions.

One of the best outcomes of the workshop is that the families are able to take their creations home to taste and share with the family.

Families who joined us last year said:

“ I learnt some great family friendly recipes and tips. Made some wonderful friends and got to eat lots of scrummy food with my children. An absolutely amazing opportunity. ”

“ I’d definitely recommend this class to families – it’s a great opportunity to make friends and have fun! ”

“ Myself and my son really enjoyed these sessions. I’m not confident in the kitchen but it was really lovely to see the same families each week and watch myself believe in me. All the staff and volunteers were a great support and it was nice to have all the space and equipment to get busy in the kitchen. ”

See our Full Tummies Cooking Workshop photos on Pages 12 & 13!

For more information please contact Home-Start West Somerset on 01643 707304 or email: admin@homestart-westsomerset.org.uk



Follow us on social media to keep up to date



to mum, to baby, to everyone...



Scan me!

## Supporting dads to have the best possible relationships with their families

Report from ‘Dad Matters’ co-ordinator Charlie:

I have been in post for over a year supporting dads in Somerset, with a focus on the perinatal stage. However, many require help and support dealing with the demands of older children within their family unit, which I am happy to provide.

From Minehead in the West, criss-crossing the county all the way to Frome in the East, by far the biggest need amongst new fathers is to receive open mental health support to help them deal with and process the emotional changes that occur during this early, crucial stage in their fatherhood journey. I do assure them that the 80% drop in testosterone experienced by dads during the perinatal period is nature’s way of preparing them to be a dad, and that the resultant feelings of angst, confusion, and a general sense of ‘not being myself’ are all completely normal and to be expected. It usually comes as some relief to learn that, on talking through their feelings and struggles, it is perfectly normal to not always feel the sense of being ‘on top of the world’ that deep-rooted societal pressures often expect us to feel.

The most specific worries reported to me in the early months concern, predictably, infant crying and sleeping and how best to manage this on both a practical and emotional level. I use the ICON methodology in this instance. Its message has, pleasingly, already been relayed successfully to all the dads I have supported. In addition, I have also focused on how best to support mum during this stage, particularly if she herself has been suffering with poor mental health. I always make the assumption that if the mum is suffering then the dad is too – and vice versa.

Whether online, over the phone or in-person, the support and mentoring offered frequently addresses wider issues surrounding work, family and community relationships that directly affect dad’s mental health. The challenging geography of the county, with the attendant patchy and uneven access to key services, poses significant challenges to all young families in the county; particularly so during the current post-pandemic costs-of-living crisis. I therefore spend much time signposting to the various charities I work with that can help mitigate these concerns. This is in addition to guiding dad towards paying as much attention to his physical as his mental health.

Overall, it is positive that mental health support for dads is now receiving much more recognition, and that men increasingly recognise that burying or ignoring their concerns is not necessarily a sign of true strength. The perinatal period, in particular, brings this to focus and the dads receiving help in Somerset at this stage all recognise that asking for help is crucial in building a solid foundation for their future fatherhood.



For more information, please get in touch:

Charlie Hull | Dad Matters Coordinator, Somerset  
e: charlie.dadmatters@homestart-westsomerset.org.uk  
t: 07483 123652 (Mobile)









# Tuning into Kids

## Emotionally intelligent parenting



An interesting, informative and interactive course to help parents connect with their child, understand the emotions behind behaviours and develop their emotion coaching skills.

The course is delivered over 6 sessions in our training room at Alcombe Children’s Centre where there is always a warm welcome along with like-minded parents and great refreshments!

We aim to help parents recognise and understand their child’s emotions, emotional reactions and behaviours and support them to find how best to help their child to develop resilience and self-regulation. This can have a huge impact on future outcomes, the science behind what goes on in our brains and how this impacts our mental and physical health is a great insight in to why we need to build on our emotional intelligence.

There is also a focus on parental well-being and mindfulness, this is an essential part of how we cope with the rollercoaster of parenting!

Alongside the course we offer a resource library where parents can borrow books, toys and activities to use at home to help build their emotional vocabulary and skills with their family.

Feedback from parents who have previously taken part in the course:

“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, its how we deal with them 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 going on.”

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



# Story-Start

“I have continued to enjoy sharing books, rhymes and songs with parents and children at Porlock Community Toddler Group. It has been especially rewarding to see children, who I knew just a few years ago as a ‘bump’, run up to me when I arrive with the books and help me unpack. They often choose a favourite book to share with their parent, with me or just look at it on their own. They know that the books are all for them to share and enjoy.

I was so happy when one of the mums, whose twins were leaving the group to go to the school nursery, thanked me and said that she felt Story-Start had made a real difference to her children and had opened up the enjoyment of books for them as a family. Many of the parents have told me that they and the children look forward to sharing the Story-Start books and enjoy having the interaction and contact with another adult at the sessions.”

Catherine Rayner, Story-Start Volunteer



Story-Start Feedback:

“ My child who is 2 years old loves the Home-Start visits to Porlock toddler group. She enjoys the book time stories and nursery rhyme to sing along too. ”

Phoebe

“ My daughter who is at school often talks about Cathy and the Story time from toddler group. She remembers getting involved and enjoying the stories with her friends. I can’t wait for her baby brother to get more involved. ”

Hayley

“ Both my children (ages 3 years and 1 year) really enjoy the Story-Start visits. The story time is always so interactive for parents and children, reading and singing along with actions too. I think it’s so important in a world becoming so increasingly technological that we take time as children and adults to strip it back and just sit and read stories from actual books and have fun! ”

Natalie





# Montessori

## What is Montessori?

Is it a dinosaur? Is it a new dance craze? Can I cook it in the air fryer? Did we hear about it from Tik Tok? Well, it's better than all of that!

**Montessori is a system of child-led education and experiences... Let us explain!**

Montessori Education was developed by Maria Montessori, dating back over a hundred years, and it continues to gain popularity due to its straightforward, child-centred approach, where children, toddlers and babies are treated with respect during their development.

Through careful observations, parents can learn how to cater to their child's learning needs and foster their independent learning through the concept of 'Freedom within Limits'.

## What are the Principles of Montessori?

- **The Subconsciously Absorbent Mind** – Children aged 0-3 are seen to absorb information by 'doing' and experiencing the world at first-hand. The human brain learns more during this time than at any other time.
- **The Prepared Adult** – the role of the adult is essential for leading by example, by showing children how to do things and then stepping back to allow the children to teach themselves through hands-on experience.
- **The Prepared Environment** – the environment is well prepared by the adult to enable the child to develop freely within specific boundaries, with a certain amount of free choice.
- **Internal Development** – adults should not compare their child to other children, instead respect the child's interests, ways of learning and what they want to learn.
- **Internal Learning Motivation** – adults to help steer children's love of learning and create special opportunities, where children can make experiences for themselves.
- **Observation** – This is massively important and is a core element of all Montessori education practices. The art of observation is for adults to observe their children's actions and recognise their new interests.

The adults lead by example and create 'yes spaces' where children can make mistakes and learn from them.

This means that children experience cause and effect, creating opportunities for deep seated understanding of the world around them. While this happens, the adults prepare the environment to facilitate this, and the cycle continues.

## Baby-Start Endorsed by Montessori Global Education

We are extremely proud to announce Baby-Start is now fully endorsed by Montessori Global Education! The session plans and delivery style closely follow the core principles of Montessori.

The Home-Start/Montessori link has been gaining momentum since November last year, when Baby-Start first came to the attention of Montessori Global Education due to its child-led focus, with the parent enabled to become their child's first educator.

Baby-Start was initially written by Hayley Williams at Home-Start West Somerset in 2020 and delivered via zoom during a Covid lockdown.

Baby-Start continues to be delivered by Hayley to families across West Somerset to enable families from all areas and backgrounds the opportunity to engage in the sessions.

So far, more than 100 families have attended these free interactive and engaging sessions for babies 0-12 months and sometimes with their Home-Start Volunteer too!



### Parenting Top Tip!

Freedom with limits – Help your toddler be independent by creating opportunities for choice!

For example, laying out two outfits to choose from to wear for nursery, letting them dress themselves where possible by allowing plenty of time for two legs to go in one trouser hole and to try again! Hooray!

## Staff training with Montessori Global Education and continuous professional development opportunities

Following on from the Montessori link with Baby-Start, we have been delighted to receive training as a team on 'Integrating Montessori Practice (IMP): Infant & Toddler Specialism (Birth to Three Years)' and this will enable our team to embed the principles of Montessori into our groups and courses for families we work with.

We hope that by incorporating the language used and pedagogy (the method of how teachers teach, in theory and in practice) we will put the foundations in early with families to feel they are their child's first educator. We hope they will become confident with some simple techniques and ideas and use these within their home lives to create environments and spaces for their children's independent learning.



## Best Start – The Next Step for Toddlers 12-36 Months

Following on from our Bump-Start and Baby-Start sessions, which cover the first 0-12 months, we are now looking at provision for 12-36 months so we cover the first plane of development as identified by Maria Montessori.

Best Start would be accessible to families attending toddler groups in West Somerset through our pre-existing links. This would mean the whole family would be involved and the approach of Best Start would be offered in a holistic way, taking into account our knowledge of the wider family, their community and influences. This would allow the building of trusting relationships with families, in a familiar place where they feel safe. The aim of Best Start would be to promote confidence in the parents and carers to be their child's first educator/ teachers. This would be facilitated by showing them how to develop and use skills such as reflection and listening to the child's non-verbal communication.

Community links are vital to deliver Best Start as it is often through personal recommendation that families attend playgroups or access parenting programmes. As many communities in West Somerset are rural and isolated, it is essential to ensure that there is effective communication and that a good rapport is established with those we wish to network with, such as through a pre-school or school-run toddler group.

Best Start is a gentle approach of getting to know families and their children – building trusting relationships and then providing an opportunity for their child to enjoy an activity. During this time the practitioner can guide the parent in ways of enabling their child to become an independent learner. They can help them reflect on their child's sensitivities and interests to scaffold the development opportunities further. For each visit from Best Start the practitioner should provide a different tray of Montessori-inspired resources to share with the group. Our hope with Best Start is that we can ensure the methods of Montessori are accessible to families in all areas, and from all backgrounds.

“ It has been such a privilege for us all in Home-Start West Somerset to have been given this wonderful opportunity to learn, gaining an understanding and knowledge about Montessori and its principles. It has really inspired everyone in the team and the Montessori approach works brilliantly in parallel with Home-Starts' own practice. We're so excited about a future with Montessori and especially the endorsed Baby-Start programme, what an accolade! Now planning is in place for further child and family led schemes. ”

Clare Pound, Manager of Home-Start West Somerset

“ It has been a delight to work with such committed and passionate colleagues from Home-Start West Somerset. From the outset, they have been focused on their Continuous Professional Development and how they can improve outcomes for their children and families. Montessori Global Education is proud to support such commitment. ”

Preeti Patel, Director of Education at Montessori Global Education





## An activity project with a difference!

With the impact of the war in Ukraine spreading far and wide, a number of Ukrainian families and individuals have found safe places to stay in West Somerset (thanks to the generous people who have stepped forward to host).



When Home-Start West Somerset was approached by Somerset Activity Sports Partnership to see if we would be able to deliver an activity project for the families of course we said yes!

With the funding being granted by Sports England and the project overseen by the amazing SASP team, we have planned and delivered some really fun, active and engaging sessions for the families to enjoy.

Activities that families have taken part in include swimming, orienteering the famous Dunster castle grounds, rope climbing and bush craft skills to name a few.

Maya Clayden who has been coordinating the project said **“Through planning this project I have had the pleasure of meeting some lovely people. It’s been a really rewarding project to work on. We have put on activities and events with the aim to welcome people who are going through challenging times to get to know the local area and what’s on offer here and to promote the use of local facilities in the future”**.

We want to give a special mention to our friends over at the WS Refugee Welcome Hub for their support in promoting this project and to Katya for her assistance in translating at the events.

At Home-Start West Somerset we are committed to responding to the needs of people in our local area and we are thrilled to be in a position to support individuals from all walks of life.



### Діяльності для вас

ДОСЛІДИТЬ МІСЦЕВІСТЬ І ТЕ, ЩО ВОНА МОЖЕ ЗАПРОПОНУВАТИ



#### Скейтбординг/скелелазіння

Minehead Eye – це спеціально побудований критий скейтпарк із обладнанням для скелелазіння. Членство та ваучери на сеанси.



#### Плавання

Сімейні сеанси плавання в шкільному басейні St Michaels у Майнхеді (бронюйте за посиланням) і ваучери на плавання в басейні Hoburne Blue Anchor.



#### Заняття фітнесом

Ваучери на різноманітні фітнес-класи з Number 1 Fitness (бронювати безпосередньо) Місця в Данстері та Майнхеді



#### Лісова школа та спортивне орієнтування

Сімейне орієнтування та пікнік із Сюзанною та національним парком Ексмур (бронювати за посиланням) Сімейна лісова школа та пікнік з Ema Wild Wellies (забронювати за посиланням)



**49**  
displaced families  
attended activities  
in total

## Learning Together

2023 has seen the continued delivery of our Learning Together outreach visits to the wonderful baby and toddler groups across West Somerset. We visit from Dulverton to Nether Stowey and everywhere in between!

Learning Together is designed and delivered with the aim to empower, upskill and support parents in a fun, friendly and non-judgemental way to learn new tips and tricks to support their children’s learning.

Learning Together is helping parents and carers to realise their full potential as the child’s first and most important teacher and emotional regulator.

We are continuing to give families the most up to date, relevant information. Through working in partnership with early years experts who can provide scientifically proven knowledge about why specific things are so important in the early years of a child’s life.

Some of the visitors that we have facilitated include members of the Health Visitor team who shared information on health and development, including sleep, toilet training and nutrition and visits from an early years music education specialist, who worked with the groups exploring the benefits of providing access to music for young children.



As well as providing information and resources, we are there to provide a listening ear in a setting where families feel safe to share.

The Learning Together team would like to thank all of our partners and of course the groups and families who attend them for their continued support, we couldn’t do it without them!

**150+**  
families  
reached

**11**  
groups  
visited

**264**  
hours of delivery directly  
with families



### Group Lead Feedback:

“ It has been really good having Maya visit; it has given the parents additional information and resources and I think that they have learned new things. I hope it can continue. Thank you. ”

Jo, Pop Up Tots, Minehead

“ We have loved having Maya with us and meeting the different professionals that she has brought with her over the years. Maya has been so friendly and mixed very well with all the parents and carers at our group. Parents have gained knowledge and the others that we could not give them. Thank you. ”

Rachel, The Hub Group





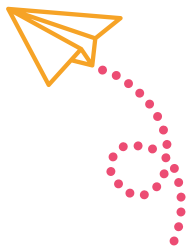
## Success Story: SJ

SJ came to us at Home-Start back in February 2021. She was a single mum of two, who had recently split from her partner. She was working part-time and struggling with anxiety and low self-esteem. She found it hard to find the confidence to be able to go out of the house on her own and was struggling with all the usual difficulties of managing a break-up.

We matched SJ with one of our trained Home-Start volunteers to offer emotional support and friendship through this difficult time. SJ and her volunteer Elaine became good friends. Support was given through regular home visits and through text and phone calls in between times. They also enjoyed some great days out during school holidays, craft sessions and a Home-Start family Christmas event at the Minehead Eye.

In late 2022, SJ sadly suffered the loss of her Mum whom she was extremely close to. SJ also became a mum of three with the arrival of her third son. We continued to support her through these times and offered some one-to-one emotional coaching sessions to help with both her own and the children's emotional intelligence and resilience. Through these sessions we worked on self-care and confidence-building strategies, looked at triggers of stress, how to manage emotions, problem solving, empathy, choices and boundary setting. We shared some great resources from our emotional coaching resource library to use with children.

With her new-found confidence and lots of encouragement, SJ and her new son enjoyed joining our Baby-Start group run by Hayley in Watchet. This is a lovely 6-week course open to parents and babies up to 12 months old. We are all very proud of how far SJ has come and she recently amazed us when she told us that she and her friend were planning to start a new baby group of their own with the use of a room in the local school! What a fantastic positive step!! We hope that SJ will continue on this positive journey and wish her every success with the Little Seedlings baby group.



### Do you ever feel like this?

- Isolated in your community, with no family nearby and struggling to make friends.
- Suffering with post-natal illness but finding it hard to talk to anyone about it.
- Having a hard time coping with your child's illness.
- Overwhelmed by the death of a loved one.
- Struggling with the emotional and physical demands of having twins, triplets or more.
- Struggling to cope with a disability or relationship problems.
- Tired, unhappy, exhausted.
- ... or any similar problems?

### Home-Start can help you and your family

We help thousands of parents just like you. Our support is mostly for families with at least one child under seven. But we can sometimes help if your children are older. Our Home-Start volunteers are parents themselves or have parenting experience – so they know just what you're going through.

They will visit you in your own home – usually once a week. You decide what you will do together.

Maybe you need someone to talk to who won't judge you; a shoulder to cry on or perhaps someone to play with or read to your children; maybe a bit of support to make or keep medical appointments or to find out what else is available locally. You choose.

### All you have to do is ask...

If you think Home-Start could help, why not find out more? Talk to your doctor or health visitor or contact us yourself. Get in touch with Home-Start West Somerset by phoning **01643 707304** or online at **[www.homestart-westsomerset.org.uk](http://www.homestart-westsomerset.org.uk)**. We'll be pleased to hear from you. If you do decide to ask for support, one of our local co-ordinators will get together with you, talk about your needs and carefully match you with a volunteer.



## Case Study: Molly & Charlie

We first met Molly and Charlie during their second trimester of Molly's pregnancy with baby Esme. We were put in touch with the family initially through the local midwife and we provided information and support with our Bump-Start Programme.

The family were young parents expecting their first baby, and it was important they would know who to access for services when they felt ready.

We were delighted when Molly contacted us to arrange attending the Baby & Brunch Club, following a chat with her Health Visitor.

Molly told us how nervous she felt to walk into a new place, so we arranged to meet her and baby Esme outside our building. We then helped them settle in the session with the other families.

Soon Molly and Esme were attending every week and took part in song time, enjoyed our stories and built-up confidence with the other peer families.

Around the same time, we were delighted to be able to match the family to a Home-Start Volunteer, Elaine, who has continued with regular weekly visits for over a year now.

Elaine and Molly get along brilliantly, and when dad Charlie is at work, Elaine encourages Molly to get out to playgroups, the library and access local services with Esme confidently.

Molly often would not want to go out with Esme on her own, but they now they often pop out for trips to the shops or the local park.

Molly needed Elaine's help to get the ball rolling with accessing the correct advice for her family at the West Somerset Advice Bureau. With some gentle encouragement, the family are now in a much-improved situation. Molly just needed someone to stand by her side and help with Esme during appointments and when Charlie was working.

Molly has had some challenges with feeling isolated and sometimes anxious. This brings with it significant self-doubts about her parenting, but through attending group sessions with us and with her friendship with volunteer Elaine, Molly is doing brilliantly!

Molly has recently attended our 5 Ways to Wellbeing Course which helps her to manage difficult times and Esme really enjoyed the nursery space and seeing other toddlers.

We also want to celebrate Molly accessing and completing our Full Tummies cookery sessions! Molly made some amazing dishes for her family to enjoy and showed a real talent in the kitchen. Esme also enjoyed the sessions, either spending time in the kitchen with her mummy or playing in the family room.

Molly is now signed up to our Tuning into Kids Emotion Coaching Course and we are excited to welcome her to continue her journey. The family will have a head start with this as we know they watch 'Bluey' on Disney. This is an early years programme that Esme loves which demonstrates emotionally intelligent parenting strategies.



“ When I first started with Home-Start I was unexpectedly pregnant with my first baby at 19. I'd never really sought help with my mental health before until I told my midwife. They then suggested meeting Home-Start for more personal 1:1 support with a volunteer and groups for meeting other mums. Over the past 2 years almost now I have grown in confidence with my social skills and self-esteem. Looking back to when I was pregnant, I feel unrecognisable. ”

“ Molly has come a long way with the Support of Home-Start, which have made things easier at home. She is more confident and likes to be active, where as before Molly would not leave the house without me. She is more hands on with our daughter Esme and I am confident in Molly's parenting confidence when I am at work. ”

Quotes from Molly & Charlie





# Volunteers

It's often said that our amazing volunteers are the heart of Home-Start West Somerset. It's 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.

When families find themselves vulnerable, stretched, or isolated, they might benefit from support 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 more targeted support, allows us to work responsively with parents to meet a range of needs. Home-Start's work seeks to build upon parents' strengths, to empower them and their families to move forward.

A trusted relationship between parent and volunteer, starting in the home, is one of the key elements of our impact that enables people to feel more comfortable about asking for help and to feel less judged by others. Our volunteers and staff are effectively trained, supported and equipped to provide practical and emotional support that's tailored to each family. Staff and volunteers offer consistent contact with families, often visiting homes once or twice a week over many months, enabling trusted relationships to form with parents and children. This informed, responsive support enables Home-Start to harness the experience, knowledge and skills that are rooted in communities, and in other parents and caregivers. The Home-Start approach and our roots in communities mean that we are particularly well placed to reach and support families facing challenges or experiencing distress, for example through disability, poverty, poor physical or mental health, isolation, or a relationship breakdown.

Our volunteers give and share their 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.



Volunteer craft day

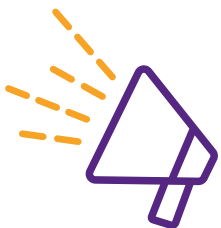
## Meet our newly trained volunteers



Holly James Sarah Catherine Jackie Katie



Lara Louise Priscilla Rosie Sue



# News & Events

## Home-Start Christmas Party

It was Ho Ho Ho all the jingle way when Home-Start West Somerset held its Christmas party in Minehead Eye for over 100 parents, children and volunteers. A truly wonderful Christmas event providing a well-deserved festive boost for families in West Somerset.

Santa's grotto, a photo booth, Christmas crafts, Rocking Wob and a fabulous Minehead Eye cooked Christmas dinner were all on the Home-Start's elf to do list creating a magical time for everyone involved.

Home-Start has been extremely fortunate this year and has received some wonderful kind donations, presents and volunteer time enabling us to give generously to the Home-Start families in West Somerset. Home-Start Manager, Clare Pound, said: **"It's so lovely to see our local community give generously what they can to others during the festive period taking some of the heightened pressures off families at this time of year and letting them know that people do care about them"**.

## Home-Start has an allotment!

So, excitingly, Home-Start has taken on an allotment to create some outside space for families to share and enjoy. As you can imagine, we've got a lot of work to do! But we have plans. We're aiming to create a Montessori-inspired outdoor environment. The allotment will be divided up into areas to include: an area for growing fruit and vegetables; a small pond/insect-friendly exploration area; a reflective patch underneath a small apple tree with hanging wind chimes and mirrors; a play area which will include a mud kitchen. However, these plans for the allotments will involve some hard work! So, we are looking for any volunteers who would be prepared to help us with this project and hopefully the photo will look very different next year!

## Home-Start Plant Sale

The Home-Start West Somerset annual plant sale took place on Saturday 20th May which was a hugely successful event for the Home-Start West Somerset funding pot and all gardeners across West Somerset who attended. Such a huge variety of plants available to buy with expert advice freely given out, topped off with a cuppa!

Manager, Clare Pound, said: **"On behalf of Home-Start West Somerset we want to thank everyone involved for all their hard work in organising the wonderful Home-Start plant sale that raised the fantastic total of £1320.45 which will help enormously with our ongoing work in supporting families with young children across West Somerset"**.

For next year's plant sale we are looking for growers and helpers. Please contact **Clare at Home-Start on: 01643 707304**.



### Lots of people to thank:

- |                     |                 |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Minehead Eye        | Morrisons       |
| Somerset            | West Somerset   |
| Community           | Food Cupboard   |
| Foundation          | Werner Hartholt |
| Wootton             | of Butlins      |
| Courtenay Villagers | The Hairy Dog   |
| BT and Openreach    | Threads         |
| TSB in Minehead     |                 |







## A Special Thank You

Home-Start Manager, Clare Pound, said: ***"It's a wonderful beginning and a Happy New Year for Home-Start West Somerset who would like to thank Brushford carol service, Luxborough carol singing event and Take Three Girls theatre company for their incredible fundraising endeavours over the Christmas holidays. Together they raised an awesome total amount of £1164.05, so a huge thank you to everyone involved in those events. All the monies raised will go directly into helping and supporting families in West Somerset by home visiting and various group support providing a much needed and highly valued service."***

*Letter in West Somerset Free Press (January 2023)*

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

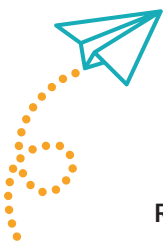
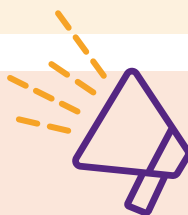
Somerset County Council  
Somerset West & Taunton Council  
West Somerset Opportunity Area  
Lottery Community Fund  
Somerset Community Foundation  
Somerset West Lottery  
Easyfundraising  
Dorothy Whitney Elmhurst Trust  
Amazon Smile  
Judith's Plant Sale  
Morrisons

Magical Thinking Jewellery  
Blueberry  
Masons  
Poppins  
The Brushford PCC  
Luxborough Carol Singers  
Jen Warwick  
Jillian Merer  
The Rotary of Minehead  
West Somerset Folk Festival  
Donation

Minehead Bid  
Jenny High  
Home-Start UK  
FRIENDS of Home-Start  
West Somerset  
Greenslade Taylor Hunt  
Dulverton Crafters  
Linus Project  
SASP  
Wootton Courtenay villagers

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, the Upper Room sales plus many more. You have all been brilliant, thank you!



ALCOMBE Children Centre  
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