

Home-Start Knowsley

What's the link between stress busting courses, a herb growing mission, exploring sibling rivalry, debt management skills and First Aid training? Answer: all this and much, much more can be found in the track record of Home-Start Knowsley.

Home-Start first began humbly in the early 1970's with the vision of one woman in Leicester. In 1973 Home-Start Knowsley joined the swelling ranks of a movement focussed upon giving the support to families that meant children could enjoy the best possible start in life at home. Today Home-Start UK has 314 local groups across England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and British Forces bases in Germany and Cyprus and that's not all. Home-Start as a movement is active in 22 countries on five of the worlds' seven continents.

Having a baby, especially having your first baby, can be enormously isolating for parents. On top of the tiredness and newness of caring for this small human being comes the worry about doing things properly and how to 'know' that you are getting it right. The UK is fortunate in having great healthcare professionals – midwives and health visitors – who support new parents in the very early days but that isn't always enough.

For more than forty years families with children under eight who are finding things tough have befriended and supported by the volunteers of Home-Start Knowsley. Today a highly trained and expert by experience band of around 50 volunteers help local families tackle challenges as diverse as breastfeeding or giving up smoking to eating well on a budget or getting ready for school.

While Home-Start receives referrals from a variety of agencies including Childrens Centres and health workers, interestingly the majority of families 'self refer' so the families take the initiative and contact the team. There are always more families waiting for support than there are available volunteers to provide support so every week is a busy week for Home-Start manager Pam Bowes and her team.

It would be difficult to argue with principle of Home-Start.

Intuitively we all sense that enabling parents to do their best by their children has to be worthwhile and that helping parents feel less alone should make a positive difference.

In a time of austerity, however, intuition isn't enough to keep the money coming and the door open. Fortunately there has been a lot of work done to explore and capture exactly the difference being made by the Home-Start service namely that:

- there are four main types of support needs expressed by families – parenting skills, parental wellbeing, children's wellbeing and family management
 - volunteer support enables families to measurably improve in all four areas
 - the most significant improvements are specifically seen in coping with feeling isolated, coping with own mental health and managing children's behaviour
- (source [Building Resilience Research 2013](#))

So there you have it – intuition and hard evidence bearing one another out – maybe that’s why if you ask Pam how she feels about her work she says ‘ we will champion families to the end’ and you know she means every word.