

Charity Collection Submission – Home Start Merton

June 2018: Home-Start Merton celebrates 25 years supporting Merton families.

Home-Start's key aim is to help parents improve their parenting skills so that they can provide a happier and healthier home environment. We support parents to engage with local services, feel less isolated and have wider horizons, enabling greater engagement in community life. Home-Start's model is based on families being introduced and matched with a home visiting volunteer.

Our volunteers provide 1:1 home visiting support for families in need who have a child under the age of 11. Volunteers receive good quality training from Home-Start to make them effective and knowledgeable in their role. Our volunteers work alongside families rather than "doing for" to encourage families to function independently.

We provide the following:

- Emotional and practical support to help parents improve their parenting skills.
- Our core work provides support to parents in the family home to help improve their parenting skills to enable a more positive relationship with their children. Our volunteers, who are parents offer befriending support and guidance to parents who have often not had a positive childhood themselves.
- Sign post and refer families to other agencies that specialise in their needs such as housing, financial advice, benefits advice, CAMHS (child & adult mental health service) and specialist support with child behaviour.
- Provide telephone support for parents.
- Cook & Eat programme which teaches parents and children how to enjoy cooking from scratch, teaches parents how to buy nutritional food on a budget..
- Money for Life project which enhances parents skills to manage their finances by encouraging budgeting, the dangers of negative borrowing and living on credit, how to deal with debtors, credit unions and saving for adults and children.
- Perinatal mental health support which supports a parent pre-birth and up to the child's first birthday.

We support parents to return to education and work. Some decide to become Home-Start volunteers once their own support has ceased. This gives them the confidence to progress into further education or employment.

Our early intervention model supports parents experiencing mental ill-health to gain strategies and coping mechanisms to improve their confidence and emotional wellbeing. We enable and empower parents to grow in confidence in their parenting role, thereby improving the outcomes for children. We work in partnership with both statutory and voluntary organisations within the borough, to ensure the family receives the best support available and in so doing we complement the work of others to ensure positive outcomes for their children.

The needs and characteristics of the people we help.

Parenting is universal, some parents that have experienced a negative upbringing themselves often do not have the learned skills to parent their children in a positive way. Parents we support struggle with a complex range of issues such as multiple births/ learning difficulties/ facing eviction. Although poverty or low income are a reality for many families, isolation, postnatal depression, domestic abuse, poor parenting, disability, financial difficulties, benefit caps and mental health can impact on families well-being regardless of wealth, ethnicity or age – these issues do not discriminate.

Families struggling with financial difficulties often present with contributing factors of depression, domestic abuse and relationship difficulties. The children through no fault of their own are often the victim of their parents worries but powerless to do anything. London is one of the richest cities in the world but has the highest rates of child poverty in the UK. In 2018, the capital continues to experience a demonstrable increase in child poverty with 60% of children living in poverty, with at least one working adult, (Childhood Trust London Child Poverty Report 2018). As of January 2018, 32% of children are living in poverty in Mitcham and Morden.

Poor mental health of parents is often the reason families are referred to us. We have seen an increase in women reporting pre and post-natal depression, mental ill health, domestic abuse and a high level of children with diagnosis of Asperger's, Autism, ADHD and behavioural issues. Mental ill health is a significant factor in the borough with limited resources available for families. The quality of adult mental health is built on the foundations laid in the early years of children's lives. Children as young as four are suffering with mental health issues, panic attacks, anxiety and depression. 50% of adult mental ill health starts at the age of 15 and 75% has started before the age of 18. Due to the cuts in budgets and services in the local authorities there is an increasing gap in service provision.

60% of the families we support state that they do not hold out much hope for the future or of making anything of themselves, which leads to parents not having the confidence to seek employment, which impacts on children living in workless households.

In 2016-17, one volunteer went on to become a youth worker, two became social workers, three teaching assistants and two counsellors. Occasionally parents we have supported go on to become volunteers for Home-Start Merton, once their own support has ended. In 2017, four parents of our previously supported families' became volunteers.