

Annual Report April 2020—March 2021



Above: Home-Start Cotswolds Coordinators preparing activity packs during lockdown, April 2020

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**The Queen's Award
for Voluntary Service**

The MBE for volunteer groups

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The financial year 2020/21 ended much as it began, with our normal working practices disrupted by the continuing Covid pandemic. However, as you will see from the rest of this report, our staff and volunteers once again ‘stepped up to the plate’ and continued to support families innovatively and effectively.

Lockdowns and social distancing also meant that the Trustees and the Management Committee learnt to fully embrace video conferencing technology and, having successfully held our last AGM via Zoom, we felt it appropriate to repeat this for 20/21. I hope that next year we will be able to assemble in person.

Although no Group support was provided during the year, due to the restrictions, the success of our Reconnect Group in previous years led us to develop plans for expanding this service, which I will return to at the end of the report. During the latter part of the year, as part of Home-Start Gloucestershire (the consortium formed in 2020 consisting of Home-Start Stroud & Gloucester, Home-Start North & West Gloucestershire and ourselves), a new service called [Dad Matters Gloucestershire](#) was launched, which aims to help dads to have positive relationships with their families. It supports dads with their wellbeing and mental health and encourages them to participate in services that have traditionally been targeted at mums, as well as providing invaluable peer support. The scheme is led by Dad Matters Coordinator, Lee Houghton, assisted by volunteers known as ‘Dad Champions’. It is part of [Dad Matters UK](#) that is already being run successfully within other Home-Start Schemes across Greater Manchester and we hope it will continue to grow in Gloucestershire.

We are fortunate to have the continued support of our funders, notably The John Armitage Trust, Peter Lang Children’s Trust and The National Lottery, who maintained their financial support during the crisis. In December, Home-Start was announced as a beneficiary of the John Lewis Partnership and Waitrose’s national campaign called ‘Give a Little Love’. We even had a mention in their renowned Christmas advertising campaign! This relationship is continuing in 2021. Then in September, another national retailer—White Stuff—announced a new three-year partnership with Home-Start across the UK. We hope that as shops open up again, we can continue to work closely with the Cirencester branch, which has been selling a range of products with proceeds donated to Home-Start.



The John Lewis Partnership’s ‘Give a Little Love’ Christmas TV ad in support of Home-Start and food charity FareShare

And last, but by no means least, many thanks must also go to Cirencester Baptist Church, who allowed our staff access to the offices when needed and who continue to support us with the use of their superb facilities.

Steve Kaufmann

Steve Kaufmann
Chair, Home-Start Cotswolds

WHAT DOES HOME-START DO?

As the impact of the coronavirus pandemic takes its toll, both physically and mentally on different groups within our society, Home-Start remains on the front line supporting parents in the critical early years of childhood.

As part of a network of trained volunteers, our approach is as individual as the people we are helping. No judgement, just compassionate, confidential help and expert support. Across all four nations of the United Kingdom, 13,500 home-visiting volunteers support over 27,000 families and 56,000 children to transform their lives. There are over 200 local, independent Home-Starts working in 71% of local authority areas across the UK.

Home-Start Cotswolds, based in Cirencester, has been supporting families throughout the Cotswolds for over 15 years. Our volunteers are parents themselves and aim to visit the families—who have at least one child under the age of five—at home in the heart of family life, to provide weekly support. A child's earliest years make the biggest impact and they are irreplaceable. We make sure those years count, so that no child's future is limited.



Volunteer, Cathy delivering family packs across the Cotswolds, November 2020

Families referred to us meet a Home-Start Coordinator who will assess their needs, match them to a trained volunteer and oversee their support. Each year we train up to 20 new volunteers, provide an ongoing training programme to existing volunteers and, as well as home visits, arrange family fun and fundraising events.

During 2020-21, due to Covid-19, we have been unable to run our Reconnect Group for mums in the North Cotswolds who experience mental health difficulties. (See Looking Ahead section for more information on our Group Work).

Home-Start Cotswolds works in partnership with other statutory and voluntary organisations across the Cotswolds, to ensure that together we can provide the best support a family needs, at a time when they need it most.



Why I wanted to become a Home-Start Cotswolds trustee, by David Pointet

‘I was a Home-Start Runnymede & Woking trustee for 14 years and, having moved to the Cotswolds, I wanted to continue offering a service to the charity. I always aspired to become a local Home-Start trustee, as all children need a happy and secure childhood and parents play the key role in giving their children a good start in life to help achieve their full potential. Every family is special and Home-Start responds to each family's needs through a combination of home-visiting support, group work and social events.’

STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION

Trustee Directors

Steve Kaufmann (Chair), Clare Baker (Safeguarding Adviser), Antony Jones (Company Secretary), Carla Partridge (Treasurer), Fiona Blacker, Hilary Morris, Chris Hall, Mike Hellens, Carolyn Ford, Richard Waller and David Pointet.

Trustees are unpaid volunteers from a variety of backgrounds, responsible for governance, financial and strategic planning. The staff are responsible for running the day-to-day operation of the scheme, reporting to the trustees on a regular basis.

The trustees meet bi-monthly with advisors and they form the Management Committee. There are three Sub-Committees (Personnel; Finance; Profile and Fundraising) that meet regularly and report back to the full committee. It is Home-Start policy that a trustee should only serve for a maximum of three years before being subject to an election.

Trustee news

We are delighted to welcome a new member to our team. David Pointet, who has recently moved to the North of our region, joins us with over 14 years' experience as a trustee with Home-Start Runnymede & Woking. David will formally join the Board of Trustees at our AGM in June.

Advisors

During the year we said goodbye to Sarah Smithson, whose involvement with Home-Start began when helping out with Home-Start Stroud's initial set up. She has been an advisor for Home-Start Cotswolds since 2007, helping shape the service we offer to families. We are indebted to Sarah for the many hours she has put into Committee Meetings, delivering training and helping at family events. Also stepping down from her role as the Volunteer Rep is Trish Dodridge. Trish continues to be one of our many valued volunteers and we thank her for her contribution to the Committee.



We also welcome Kieri Dainty, who joins the Management Committee as a Family Advisor.

Staff

Janice Gibson and Katharine Campbell, Senior Coordinators
Lynn Hurley, Coordinator, North Cotswolds
Danella (Dee) Weir, Office Coordinator
Sally Mason and Gillian Eames, Administrators

All our staff work part-time and their combined hours amount to 2.9 FTE.

Staff news

We are excited to have recruited a new Group Coordinator, who will start work with us in June 2021. She will be setting up and running groups for families across the Cotswolds. We look forward to reporting on our progress in next year's Annual Report.

SUMMARY OF 2020-2021

FAMILIES

In the past year (April 2020—March 2021), Home-Start Cotswolds has supported 55 families with a total of 123 children.

In normal circumstances our volunteers spend 2-3 hours with a family, in the home, every week. As parents supporting parents, they build a relationship with the family providing regular support within the home. They offer a listening ear; practical help with children; fun play ideas; outings to the park or playgroup; assistance with budgeting and often bake and cook alongside the family. The average length of support is nine months. We aim to help families feel more resilient and better integrated into their community.

However, this year we have been working under the government guidelines brought out across the UK in response to Covid-19 and we had to adapt our support of families. We have offered flexible and varied support, depending on the shielding requirements and wishes of the families and volunteers. When we were unable to provide our usual face-to-face home support, we provided help via telephone, facetime, outdoor walks and activity packs.

The average length of support offered to families was extended, as they struggled to manage with young children at home during lockdown and more involvement was required from our staff team. Managing mental health and issues of isolation are always high on the agenda for the parents we support and these issues were exacerbated during the pandemic, with raised anxieties around infection, negative media and financial difficulties.

At the close of the year, all the new referrals we were receiving had had lockdown babies. These families have had to negotiate pregnancy, birth and being new parents with all the fears associated with the pandemic, as well as having limited family or peer support. Many of the Mums are struggling with their mental health, anxious about venturing out into the community and worried about their babies displaying separation anxiety. Our volunteers are bringing invaluable support at a critical time in families' lives.



Children with suncatchers made from our activity packs, May 2020

Families supported in 2020-21

- 18 Lone parents
- 24 Families asking for support for their mental health
- 11 Families had issues with physical health or disabilities
- 12 Mums had experienced domestic abuse
- 28 Children have Children & Families services involvement

We were unable to run our Reconnect Group during 2020, although we will be starting a new Group Project in 2021 (see Looking Ahead section).

'As a health visitor, I have found Home-Start Cotswolds to be an invaluable service to refer to. The team are amazing at answering any queries and communicating throughout the process of referring and working with the families. Due to Covid-19, the past year has been a very challenging time for so many families, but Home-Start Cotswolds have continued to support the most vulnerable of clients. One mother was experiencing extreme social isolation and struggles with her baby who has additional needs. A volunteer was quickly allocated and was able to go for socially distanced walks with the mum and her baby, which she described as being 'a life-line' for her. This Mum's confidence increased dramatically and the impact of Home-Start on this mum and her baby will be lifelong.'

Tetbury Health Visitor, May 2021

SUMMARY OF 2020-2021

Family Activities

With so many restrictions in place during 2020-21, the Home-Start team needed to be resourceful to support families through the tough times, helping them when funds were short and enabling children to benefit from some fun times. We helped families in the following ways:

Activity Packs

We planned, assembled and delivered 140 activity packs during the first lockdown; 17 packs during the second lockdown and 20 packs in the 2021 lockdown. Each pack included age appropriate activities for children, self-care items, adult crafts, and recipes and ingredients for a baking project. These were well received by families who sent us pictures of the finished items—and of the creative process! As restrictions ease we plan to continue providing packs to families giving tips and ideas for healthy eating, play, outdoor activities and mental wellbeing. In addition to the packs at Christmas, Home-Start Cotswolds were able to distribute Christmas meals and presents to their supported families, thanks to the generosity of local school children, individuals and stores.

'We literally live for the delivery of treats and craft packs. The things are so special and mean so much. When I've nothing left to give, the packs arrive with everything in them to make and create. It's such a boost. Thank you so much.'

Supported mum, May 2020



Westonbirt Arboretum

Home-Start Cotswolds benefits from the Westonbirt Community Access Scheme. This enables our volunteers to access the Arboretum with their Home-Start family and enjoy the open space, which has been particularly welcome during lockdown.

'It was nice to be in a big open space. Social distancing was not a problem. The children loved the hill, the bridge and the wheel and tunnel. We would love to go back in the autumn.'

Supported mum, August 2020.



A child meets the Gruffalo at Westonbirt!



Quilts

Home-Start Cotswolds partners with Cirencester Charity Quilters, who handmake bright, cosy quilts for adults and children who have been through a difficult time. These quilts are provided free of charge. In 2020, we received over 20 quilts for our families and judging by these photos, they have been very well received!



SUMMARY OF 2020-2021

VOLUNTEERS

All our volunteers have parenting experience, are DBS checked, have attended an eight-week (40hr) preparation course and agree to work within our policies and procedures. Home visiting volunteers make weekly three-hour visits to families and on average they support a family for nine months. At the time of writing we have 42 volunteers, although during 2020-21, a number of these volunteers have been unable to visit families due to shielding.



Throughout the year we have continued to support our volunteers with regular supervision, socially-distanced meet-ups (left) and presentations of long-service awards (below). Our training and support programme for volunteers included 11 peer support groups, Zoom training on Maternal Mental Health and an information sheet on Telephone/Video Call Support Guidance.

Volunteer Preparation Course

After an extensive recruitment campaign, 15 volunteers began our eight-week online preparation course in January. All our training material was adapted to be used online and staff quickly became proficient in the intricacies of Zoom! For a variety of reasons (mainly related to the national lockdown), only 10 of the volunteers completed the course, although some of those who were unable to finish the training hope to join us for our 2022 course. This year's sessions included: Safeguarding, Confidentiality, Equal Opp, Healthy Relationships, Child Development, Inter-Agency working, Boundaries, and Keeping Yourself Safe. They also heard from a local Health Visitor and the Perinatal Mental Health Team.



I've been a Home-Start volunteer for 13 years now and enjoy it so much. It has been lovely to meet my different families – some of whom I still see – and to work with them. It is such a privilege and a pleasure to see them grow from strength to strength. Thank you Home-Start for 13 happy years of being able to give a little something back...and for my beautiful candle!' **Fiona Beck, July 2020**

'The course as a whole was extremely informative and interesting, and I have learnt a great deal from attending. The interaction with the guest speakers was excellent.'

Volunteer attending 2021 course



Volunteers receiving their end of course certificates in May 2021

HOW IS HOME-START COTSWOLDS FUNDED?

Home-Start Cotswolds is mainly funded by grants from charitable trusts, local fundraising, and donations from businesses and private individuals. We are a not-for-profit organisation and our Directors, Trustees and Volunteers are all unpaid.

In the 2020-21 financial year, our expenditure was £90,482 and our income was £105,976. Expenditure during the year was down on our original budget of £103,000, due to no Reconnect Group sessions taking place, as well as expenses associated with volunteer visits and other activities being impacted by the Covid restrictions. The Trustees have committed £5,000 of the underspend to the Group Work Project which is beginning in June 2021.

During this financial year we have benefited from funds from the following organisations and individuals. The Trustees are extremely grateful for their support which enables our work in the community to continue:

John Armitage Trust	Woodroffe Benton Foundation
Peter Lang Children's Trust	John Lewis Partnership
The National Lottery	Summerfield Trust
Bridget Plant	Albert Hunt
Tesco Bags of Help	Coln St Aldwyns Village Cinema
Gloucestershire Coronavirus Recovery & Resilience Grants	Consult & Learn

We are also thankful to the following individuals and organisations who made donations or raised money for us: Ben Miller, Sir Edward Horsfall, Jo Verey, Tamzin Blinkhorn and Hatherop School.

In 2020-21, Home-Starts across the UK have benefitted from the Give a Little Love partnership with John Lewis and Waitrose, which has funded a number of initiatives designed to support families. In the Cotswolds we have received the following help from this partnership:

- Financial support from our local Waitrose stores
- Gifts, activity packs and home cooked Christmas meals for families
- Funds to run a volunteer training course on mental health
- Funds to support 8 families with weekly volunteer support

The Trustees would like to extend their thanks and gratitude to all those who have made a contribution, financial or in kind, to Home-Start Cotswolds during this financial year.

We retain reserves of 60% of annual expenditure, in line with our policy.

The Trustees acknowledge their responsibility to identify, assess and manage risks and ensure we take action as necessary. At this moment we are in unprecedented times and the situation is changing continually for individuals and organisations. The Trustees recognise that measures taken to contain Covid-19 will impact on our activities and our governance, including finances, and will act appropriately to safeguard our staff, volunteers and families.

A copy of the audited Annual Accounts for 2020-2021 is attached to this report.



Receiving a cheque from Waitrose in December 2020

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE COMING YEAR

You will have read elsewhere in this report that although our traditional home visiting was limited by the Covid restrictions, we have still managed to support families in a number of different and innovative ways and this will continue in the coming year.

After several years of seeking funds to expand our Group Work, we are delighted to have received support for this project from Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group and John Armitage Charitable Trust. We have recruited a Group Coordinator who will be in post from June 2021 and we propose to start a number of new postnatal groups across the Cotswolds from September. The Group Coordinator will also restart our Reconnect Groups with a plan to run two each year.

During the pandemic, the need to work from home has meant that the move to cloud-based working was accelerated and has now become an integral part of how our staff work. As social restrictions ease, we will be returning to the office, albeit working more flexibly and effectively. Training on our CharityLog system is completed and will enable better reporting in the future.

Due the pandemic, our annual fundraising walk had to be cancelled in May 2020, but we are hoping to re-arrange this and other fundraising events during 2021/22, when restrictions allow.

Undoubtedly the need for our services will only increase in the coming months and we are all committed to continuing to support and help parents in any way we can.

Steve Kaufmann
Chair of Trustees
For and on behalf of the Trustees
May 2021



Volunteers Millie and Mary get ready to deliver Christmas goodies to families.

'I feel that parenting young children is one of the hardest jobs there is, and yet people often do it with very little support or guidance. I would really like to use my experiences to help other parents (and their children) to have the best experience of this time as they can.'

Newly trained volunteer 2021

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Accounts: Independently examined by Owen Accountants, Patch Cottage, Highbeech Road, The Pludds, Ruardean GL17 9UD

Home-Start Cotswolds is a Registered Charity (since July 2005) and a Company limited by guarantee.
Charity Registration number: 1110632 Company Registration number: 5468592

As an independent charity we work under the umbrella of Home-Start UK.