

Hear from one of our volunteers...



Being a parent is hard for everyone; for some it can feel overwhelming. Some parents are lucky to have a support network of family and friends to step in and help, but many don't. Our trained volunteers are matched with a family that they visit for 2-3 hours per week to provide that support when it's needed.

A volunteer might provide an extra pair of hands in the home, help the family to get out and about, provide support with paperwork or appointments, declutter, or help plan for the week ahead. No matter what they get involved with, they always provide a friendly listening ear and nonjudgemental support. One Mum recently said:

"I can't put into words what a support my volunteer has been to the family. She just makes life that little bit easier, having a familiar face every week who always finds the positives to help me when I'm struggling. The children love her and always look forward to her visits. She's been like a plus one to me and I'll always be grateful"

We spoke to Debbie, a local volunteer, to find out about her work with Home-Start Cotswolds.

How did you get involved with Home-Start Cotswolds?

After moving to the local area a few years ago, I was looking to volunteer and give something back to my local community. I saw an advert for the Home-Start training course, and as a Mum of three grown up boys I liked the fact that I would be able to utilise some of my parenting skills. I really enjoyed bringing up my own children but also remember how hard it was at times; I could really relate to the fact that having someone visiting each week would have been such a help. Now I've retired and have a bit more time, I wanted to be that person to help a family going through a hard time.



What kind of things do you do as a volunteer?

It's very varied and you have to adapt to the needs of the family you are matched with. Some weeks the best support I can give is just to listen and chat through the worries they may have on their mind.

On other weeks I might help them complete a task in their home that they haven't had time to do or have put off, like putting the washing away.



I might play with the children while the parent gets some jobs done, go out for a walk to help the family get out and about, accompany them to a baby group to help give them confidence to meet new people, take them for a treat day out to the Farm Park. No two weeks are the same and I'll always speak to the family to work out what could help them most on a given week. The help often feels very simple, but having volunteered for a few years now, I know that it's sometimes the simple things that make the biggest difference.

How much time do you give?

Once matched with a family I try to visit once a week, every week for 2-3 hours, sometimes on a regular day and time and for others, different times to suit us both. Going every week enables me to build a stronger relationship with the family who know they can rely on my visits. Saying that, it doesn't mean I can't go on holiday or miss the odd week, we just try to plan around those things and keep them informed, so they know when to expect me. The support is weekly, over a period of 6 – 12 months and I love the fact that you can really get to know a family and see the changes over that amount of time - I've met some wonderful families.

What kind of skills do you need to be a volunteer?

Parenting experience is crucial, it's really important to be able to empathise and understand the stresses and strains of family life. I always try to put myself in their shoes and draw on my own experiences as a parent to support them. The ability to listen and not judge is also important in this role, you need to be able to adapt to a situation and show support and reassurance.

Do you receive any training for the role?

Yes, the team at Home-Start Cotswolds run a really comprehensive training course that you have to complete to become a home visiting volunteer. The one I attended ran one morning a week for 8 weeks. I really enjoyed the course, I met new friends and importantly, it gave me the confidence I needed to feel ready and prepared to go and visit a family. They cover lots of skills and information and talk you through some important topics, like safeguarding. Once trained you are assigned to a Coordinator who then matches you to a local family. My Coordinator is always on hand if I have any questions and I regularly catch up with her to talk through my visits, so although I visit a family by myself, I always know I can talk to someone at Home-Start and there is support there if I need it. The team also offer various training courses that I've really enjoyed, this year I've been to sessions on Hoarding Disorders, Safeguarding and School Readiness.

What do you get out of volunteering with Home-Start?

It's a lovely way to make a difference. I can still remember some of the challenges I faced as a parent, and I remember that sometimes it felt lonely. I know that children's outcomes are really impacted by their start in life so I get a real sense of satisfaction to know I have helped someone's week feel that little bit easier, relieving just a tiny amount of the pressure they are feeling and reassuring them that they aren't alone. I look forward to the family visits and made some lovely new friends within the volunteer team. We also get to meet up with fellow volunteers for coffee and training throughout the year.

Thinking of volunteering?

Home-Start Cotswolds train new volunteers once a year and their next training course will be held in Bourton-on-the-Water, starting in mid-January 2027 (Friday mornings, 9.30 - 1pm for 8 weeks). Please contact the office if you'd like to discuss if this is the right volunteering role for you:

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 www.home-start-cotswolds.org.uk/volunteering-roles/

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