

Margaret a volunteer's story

I had actually heard about Margaret Harrison and Home-Start when I visited health visitors in Leicester while I was working for Heinz Baby Foods Advisory Service. I thought then what a good idea it was but didn't really follow it up at the time because I had plenty of other commitments. But when both my children were at senior school I looked into Home-Start again, was interviewed and accepted into the 22nd course.

I have now visited many families for a great variety of reasons and admire them because I think it takes courage to ask for help, admitting that you are not coping, and then to have a stranger come into your home. But as a *Home-Start* volunteer we go once a week as a friend and as we are mothers ourselves, I think it helps them to realise we are not going to criticise them, but to help them find solutions and encourage them. Some families need just a short visit to help with short term problems but others need our help rather longer.

Just some of "my" families

One Mum was visually impaired and needed help to take her and her little one shopping and to the park so that he could go on the slide and swings and have a run around. As obviously mum couldn't see if he was safe or not in the park, the Home-Start lady could chase after him!!

Another needed short term help with feeding twins.

Another mum had a baby who never slept much during the day and cried a lot. I would go to visit and she would just give me the baby and go to bed to have an hour or so to herself. She was just exhausted. We would then chat and talk about how she could perhaps improve the situation. She had no family support.

With another family I looked after the children while mum had sign language lessons as one of the children had hearing problems.

When a new baby comes along the toddler can react badly. I went to help one young mum whose little boy was running wild round the house.....writing on the wall, climbing over the furniture, peeling off the wallpaper and throwing things around, and at mum. She needed help to discipline him. She also needed help with budgeting.

Some mums who have been used to being in control at work sometimes find it difficult to adjust. One such mum was overwhelmed with everything and when I visited, my first task each week was to sort out her daughters' socks into pairs.....she just couldn't cope with that and just kept buying more. Gradually she took on this task herself and we began to sort out her spare room together and one week when I went to visit she was so proud, she had started to paint her dining room.....regaining her confidence and motivation and feeling back in control again. In some families you see a great difference and it is so rewarding to see them grow in confidence. Others just need a lift along the way. When I had my children I had no close family or friends living nearby but I was fortunate to live in a village along with other young mums and we became friends and formed our own support group.

Many young families today are not so lucky and can feel isolated and lonely and often just need a friend to talk to and ask advice and to be encouraged. This I think Home-Start does very well and it is very rewarding when the family feel they no longer need you. I keep volunteering with Home-Start because I enjoy it and feel we make a difference in most of our families.