

ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025



Celebrating
— 25 YEARS —

**H&ME
START**

Stroud and
Gloucester



25 YEARS OF HOME-START STROUD AND GLOUCESTER

This year marks our 25th anniversary, and while much has changed, our mission remains the same: to support families with children under five who are facing difficult times. Through trained volunteers and dedicated staff, we offer free, compassionate, home-based and group support across Stroud and Gloucester. Together, we can make a difference, when it matters most. Because childhood can't wait.

CHAIR'S REFLECTION OF THE YEAR



HARRIET WALKER



HEATHER CUNILD



LYNSEY POLLARD

This year has been one of reflection, renewal, and real progress. At the heart of it all is our unwavering commitment to local families, delivered by our brilliant staff and volunteers. Their compassion, skill and perseverance have ensured that, even during a time of significant change, families across Stroud and Gloucester continue to receive the support they need. Our work with Dads has flourished through our Dad Matters drop ins, groups and one to ones, we have had some incredibly positive outcomes for Mums attending our Mothers in Minds groups which support new Mums with their mental health and the need for our home visiting service has continued to grow. This year we marked a deeply personal moment, the loss of our founder and long-standing Chair, Liz Ewart James. Her vision continues to guide everything we do, and we carry her legacy forward with care and determination. Under Harriet Walker's leadership, the Board embraced new governance frameworks and national quality standards, ensuring Home-Start Stroud and Gloucester is well-positioned for the future. This report shows the incredible work that team has delivered this year, working alongside our incredible volunteers. In the autumn, our Chief Executive, Ri Ferrier, stepped down after three years of committed leadership. We are so grateful for her contribution and wish her every success in her next chapter. We have recruited a new CEO and are thrilled to welcome Lynsey Pollard, who brings with her energy, experience, and a clear vision for the future. Finally, as Harriet stepped down from her role as Chair for health reasons, Heather Cunild stepped in as Interim Chair. Together, we remain committed to building on strong foundations and continuing to meet the rising demand for our services. It has been an eventful year, but we are proud to have emerged stronger, more focused, and more ready than ever to support families through life's most important early years.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR NEW CEO

It's a real honour to step into the role of CEO at Home-Start Stroud and Gloucester. This is a charity rooted in trust, care, and strong local connections and it's clear how much that support means to the families we work with. My background spans charity leadership, and high profile national campaigns supporting families through tough times. I know the difference early help can make, and I'm proud to be part of a team that delivers it with warmth and consistency. As more families face pressure and services are stretched, Home-Start is needed more than ever. With dedicated staff, brilliant volunteers and strong local partnerships, we're ready to rise to the challenge. Thank you for being part of this community. It's a privilege to lead this next chapter.



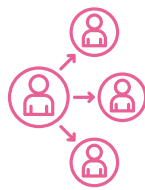
THE POWER OF HOME-VISITING SUPPORT

“Home-Start’s support is non judgemental and deeply appreciated”

A parent supported by our home-visiting team

Families tell us that having someone walking alongside them, listening, encouraging and understanding makes all the difference. Our home visiting support is personalised, compassionate, lasting on average 11 months. It builds trust when families need it most.

In 2024/25:



Referrals increased by almost 10%



Home-Start visited 107 families

Families working with our home-visiting team reported a 52% improvement in their mental health, a 42% improvement in self-esteem and confidence and a 53% decrease in feelings of isolation.

The increase in referrals is reflective of the rising pressures on the families we work with and the statutory services who support them. While we can’t meet every need directly, we work hard to offer alternative routes or support, ensuring families aren’t left behind.

VOLUNTEERS: THE HEART OF OUR WORK



We welcomed 26 new volunteers this year through three training courses.

- Two in person.
- One hybrid.

We also launched the Home-Start UK online training platform for flexible, accessible learning and introduced a telephone befriending Workshop to extend our service

GROWING OUR TEAM

We were delighted to welcome Lynne to our Home-Visiting team this year. As Family and Volunteer Coordinator for Gloucester, Lynne brings warmth, skill, and a strong professional background in Perinatal Mental Health and Occupational Therapy, quickly becoming an invaluable part of our team



THE DIFFERENCE WE MAKE

Reflections from those we support and work alongside



For our 25th Anniversary, families enjoyed a magical summer celebration with a special visit from the Gruffalo.

FAMILY FEEDBACK

“Having Jane* visit has made all the difference. Her support was non judgemental and deeply appreciated”

Families report:

- ✓ Improved mental health
- ✓ Feeling less isolated
- ✓ More quality time with children

“Thanks to Home-Start, I was able to access vital counselling when I needed it. Thank you.”

Families report:

- ✓ Increased confidence
- ✓ Better time management
- ✓ Improved household routines

PROFESSIONAL FEEDBACK

“Thank you so much for the swift contact to offer the family support”

Health Visitor

“I’m so glad to hear that Mum is doing much better. Thank you for all your help and support.”

Social Prescriber





THE STRENGTH OF GROUP SUPPORT

This year we received 623 referrals from health visitors, midwives, social workers and parents themselves and supported 569 Families and 478 Children throughout Stroud and Gloucester. Bump-Start, our ante-natal groups are informal sessions for vulnerable families referred by midwives to provide extra support on new parents' pregnancy journeys. Mothers in Mind groups are perinatal mental health programs to support women affected by mental health issues in the first two years of their parenting journey. Best-Start post-natal groups are for vulnerable parents with 0- to 6-month-old babies and are structured programs led by our highly trained group staff and Play-Start is a term time only stay and play group for families based in a rurally isolated and deprived community in the Stroud District.

	Parents Attended	Children/Babies
Bump-Start	205	127 unborn babies
Best-Start	225	197 babies
Mothers in Mind	69	74 children (incl. unborn)
Play-Start	70	85 children



Referral Pathways and Evolving Needs

Referral patterns vary significantly between our groups. For Bump-Start, 46% of referrals came directly from professionals completing a referral form. In contrast, for Mothers in Mind (MIMs), this figure rose to approximately 84%. While many families are encouraged to attend by health visitors, midwives or social workers, they are often asked to make initial contact themselves. We continue to maintain strong relationships with our referrers and work closely with them to manage expectations, improve communication, and ensure families receive the right support at the right time.

Over the past year, we've seen a notable rise in families with a history of domestic abuse, often alongside other complex challenges. This has led to parents needing longer-term support, or benefitting from more than one of our groups. In response, our staff team has undertaken trauma-informed training to ensure our support is grounded in empathy, understanding, and specialist knowledge. As demand grows, we've also seen more families seeking help in the immediate postnatal period. To address this, we are currently piloting follow-up support for a small number of Bump-Start families, where trained volunteers provide emotional check-ins after the group ends. Looking ahead, we hope to extend this support even further, placing volunteers with families during pregnancy, so that encouragement and advice are available from the earliest days. Early intervention is key, and we hope this model will also attract new volunteers who want to make a difference during this vital stage.

“The group has helped me feel more confident to be able to be a mum and I feel like I'm going away with a support network...”

	Parental wellbeing	Parental skills	Child's wellbeing	Family Management
Bump-Start improvement	53%	58%	62%	47%
Best-Start improvement	64%	50%	40%	45%

Best-Start: Average improvement in parent's confidence according to the Karitane Parenting Confidence Scale = 28%

Mothers in Mind: Using WEMWBS (Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale), average increase in wellbeing = 19%



WHAT FAMILIES TOLD US...

Bump-Start

“The group has helped me feel more confident to be able to be a mum and I feel like I'm going away with a support network.”

“I'm feeling better prepared than I did with my first birth. Whole 6 weeks was very informative and delivered really well”



Best-Start

“I've really enjoyed meeting other mums and talking through the birth process, becoming a mum and coping with our little ones. It's been so good to meet people I can relate to”.

“This really is a fantastic supportive group. I attended with my daughter and now my son. I couldn't recommend it enough”.



Mothers in Mind

“I have really enjoyed MiMs, Natasha & the team are so lovely and welcoming. It has really helped knowing I am not alone”.

“It's fantastic, I've made some great friends. Very inclusive and welcoming. I look forward to it every week”.



PLAY-START FAMILY DROP-IN (formerly known as the Arkell)

“Parents need groups like this if they have limited income to help provide their children with the best start in life.”

“This group has made a huge difference to my granddaughters life, as well as my own.
“I just love everyone here. The staff are so passionate and caring and are just fabulous with the children!”

HOW OUR GROUPS HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE

- 84% of families said the group had an excellent impact on their overall wellbeing
- 93% reported feeling less stressed
- 92% experienced a boost in self-esteem
- 100% noticed a positive impact on their child

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart, I could not have asked for a more amazing group of supportive & generous women!”





DAD MATTERS

Dad Matters is managed by Home-Start Stroud and Gloucester, Home-Start Cotswolds and Home-Start North and West Gloucestershire. Over the past year, Dad Matters Gloucestershire has continued its mission to empower fathers across Gloucestershire, delivering essential resources, groups, and tailored support. We remain steadfast in our belief in the vital role fathers play in their children's lives, and we are committed to equipping dads with the tools and community they need to thrive as parents. As we look ahead, Dad Matters Gloucestershire is focused on expanding our impact and refining our services to meet the evolving needs of dads in our community. Our goals for the coming year include growing our Stay 'n' Play groups, enhancing our digital presence with more accessible online resources, and strengthening partnerships with local organisations to offer even more comprehensive support for fathers. We are deeply thankful for the unwavering support of our community, volunteers, and sponsors, and we look forward to another impactful year of championing fathers in Gloucestershire.

Nick Darrock-Fuller - Dad Matters Project Lead

1:2:1 Support

This year, we received **119 referrals** and provided **1:2:1 support to over 100 dads**, an increase from previous years, reflecting our growing reach and the introduction of the Outcome Stars validation tool to enhance tailored support. These sessions focused on key areas such as attachment and bonding with their children, mental well-being, and signposting to additional resources. Our dedicated team, supported by an expanded volunteer base, delivered an average of 4-6 sessions per dad, totaling approximately 500 hours of direct, one-on-one support. The implementation of Outcome Stars allowed us to track progress, with 85% of participating dads reporting improved confidence in their parenting roles. This program remains a cornerstone of our mission, ensuring fathers feel supported during the critical early stages of parenthood.

Stay 'n' Play Groups

This year, Dad Matters Gloucestershire facilitated over **60 Stay 'n' Play groups**, up from 50 last year, providing essential peer support for over 500 dads through strategic partnerships with children and family centres and local community groups across the county, extending our reach to diverse areas. These sessions, run by our dedicated team of volunteers who bring their own lived experiences and knowledge, created a welcoming space for fathers to connect, share challenges like bonding or stress, and build a supportive community. The peer-led approach has proven transformative, with many dads reporting increased confidence and a sense of belonging, making Stay 'n' Play a vital part of our efforts to empower fathers throughout Gloucestershire. **95%** of attendees reporting increased confidence in their role as fathers and **80%** noting an improvement in their mental health, building on last year's success and showing the sustained impact of our peer support initiatives.

Universal Support

We continued our weekly visits to Gloucestershire Royal Hospital (GRH), reaching over **750** dads and dads-to-be, an increase from 600 last year. This program created a safe space for fathers to access guidance and support, emphasising the importance of paternal involvement from the earliest stages of parenthood.



TESTIMONIALS



"I was nervous about reaching out, but the personal support showed me I'm not alone. It's helped me connect with my little one in ways I never thought possible."

"The Stay 'n' Play sessions got me out of the house and meeting other dads. Hearing their stories, especially about bonding with their kids, made me realise I'm not the only one finding it tough—and that it gets better."



"The hospital drop-in was what I needed after my son was born. I was struggling with how to support my partner, but chatting with you guys helped me feel less alone and gave me practical tips to cope."



FINANCIAL SPOTLIGHT

INCOME AT A GLANCE

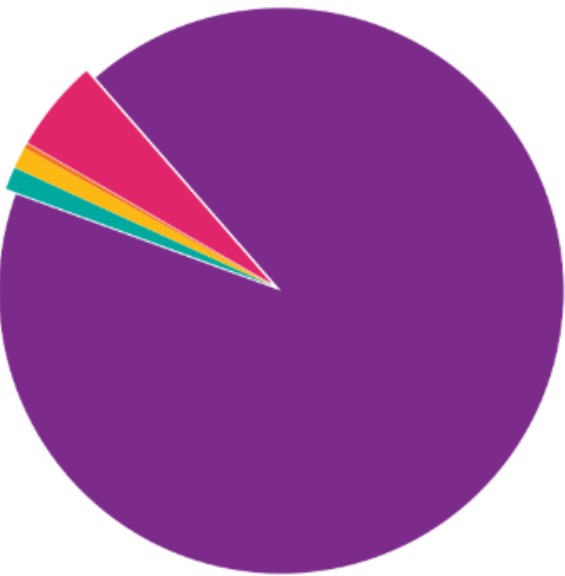
This year, Home-Start Stroud and Gloucester received £433,875 to support local families. The majority came from restricted grants to deliver frontline services.

We're deeply grateful for every donation, from individual gifts and local events to Gift Aid and small grants, helping us make every pound count.

- £433,875 total income
- 92% restricted funds
- Gift Aid + fundraising helped stretch donations further

Donations & Subscriptions (5.3%)
Gift Aid (0.3%)
Other Income (1.3%)
Fundraising Events (1.2%)

Restricted Funds (92.0%)



HOW WE SPENT OUR FUNDS

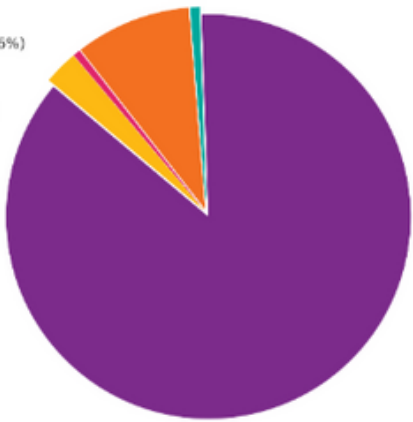
Volunteer Recruitment & Training (0.8%)

Management & Admin (9.3%)

Fundraising Costs (0.6%)

Premises Hire (2.7%)

Direct Service Delivery (86.6%)



In 2024–25, Home-Start Stroud and Gloucester spent £400,912 supporting families across our community.

We prioritised frontline delivery, with over 86% of our spending going directly to supporting families through home visiting, group work, and volunteer-led services.

We invested carefully in training new volunteers, maintaining welcoming spaces for families, and ensuring our staff had the support they needed to do their vital work. Administrative and fundraising costs were kept to a minimum.





THANK YOU

To our incredible volunteers, thank you. Your time, care and compassion make a profound difference to the families we support. Whether you're offering help in homes or leading peer support groups, your contribution is immeasurable.

To our trustees and dedicated staff, thank you for your unwavering commitment, passion and professionalism. You are the backbone of everything we do.

To our funders and supporters, thank you for believing in our mission. Your continued support empowers us to create lasting change for local families.

Together, we are making a real difference. We couldn't do it without you.

**For parents when
they need us most**

