



IMPACT REPORT

20**23**
20**24**

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WHO are we?

Home-Start Camden and Islington provides support to local vulnerable or struggling families during the integral early years of their child's life. We train volunteers who have their own childcare experience, enabling and empowering them to provide **peer-to-peer** support to parents directly in the family's home, and via group work from our office in Kentish Town and in the local community.

Our Mission

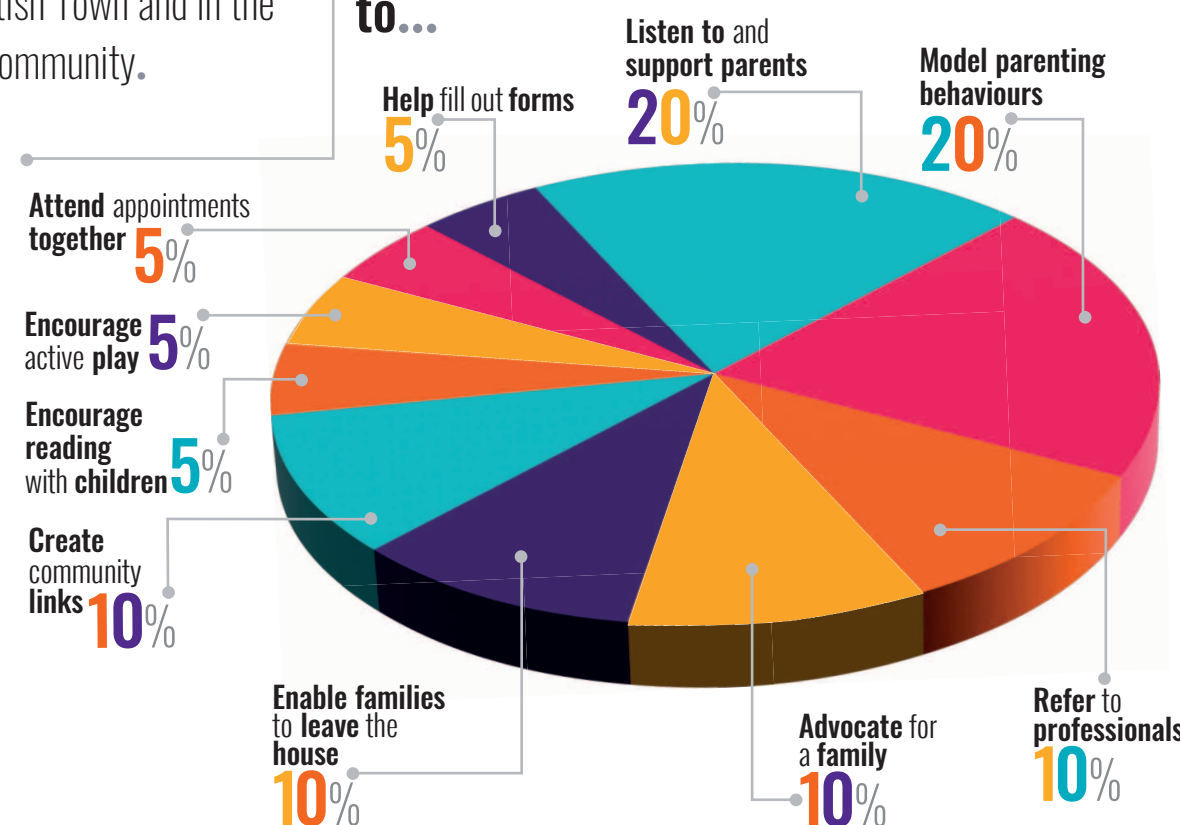
- To ensure that families with young children cope with challenges through practical and emotional support from trained volunteers.
- To recruit and train volunteers with childcare experience and knowledge to support families who are struggling.
- To build better lives for children as families learn to cope with challenges and improve their confidence.
- To secure better health, wellbeing and improve family relationships.
- To provide volunteers with new skills and confidence to enhance opportunities and experiences.

Our Vision

A Camden and Islington where all families have the support they need to give their children the best possible start in life and where volunteers are valued and encouraged.

What do we do?

Each week, a volunteer will use their time to...



Welcome Letter

Family life is layered, complex and ever-changing. And so are we.

I am so proud of **Home-Start Camden** and **Islington** because we don't believe in **"the way it should be done."** Whether that is in a conversation with an anxious parent, or in a strategy meeting with the board - we tackle every challenge with the open-mindedness and flexibility that it deserves.

Every **Home-Start** parent knows that we will never judge them, never rush them, and never disregard their expertise as parents. The service that each family receives from us is as unique as they are because we find a parent's strengths and help them to nurture their existing parenting skills.

Home is where we start from, and that's what makes our approach so unique. Our volunteers are right in the heart of the home, transforming lives from within. Because of this, not only can our volunteers spot things no other service can, but they can tackle it alongside the family.

I am also very proud that we have no waiting list. We have struggled with declining volunteer numbers since the COVID-19 pandemic, but no matter what the world threw at us all, we kept our doors, and our referrals, open. This has by no means been easy, and it is only by the pure passion of our staff - who shouldered a higher caseload to make up for declining volunteer numbers and who came up with innovative ways to stretch our service without thinning it - that we managed it.

This report only touches on the innumerable ways that our staff and volunteers touch the lives of our families. We are there at the very beginning of a child's life, but the impact lasts a lifetime.

Naomi Smith, CEO



WHY do we exist?

We support families at the most challenging point in their lives. This year, this included:

46% who survived domestic abuse

60% who did not have adequate housing

63% who had no working parents

7% who were asylum seekers or refugees

76% who had parents living with mental health conditions

60% who were lone-parent families

46% were facing financial hardship

“My volunteer is here for 3 hours but her energy and positivity lasts days”

We are...

Hyper-local - Our frontline staff and volunteers are all local people so they hold a deep understanding of the community and firsthand experience of the real issues facing residents in the area.

Family-Led - We exist to improve the lives of our families, and recognise their experiences and aspirations. We go at their pace.

Flexible - Being a small, local charity means that we are not bound by rigid processes - as the need in Camden and Islington evolves, we evolve with it. We are flexible with families too - our support fits into their lives, not the other way around.

Trusted - Our volunteers and staff are all parents who understand the challenges of raising children. Our families know that they will never be judged or dismissed, and that we will be by their side through everything.

Experts - Our staff, volunteers and trustees are experts in the early years field. We use this knowledge not only to give the best start in life to our supported children, but to influence policy and raise awareness in the wider community.

Consistent - We provide long term support and journey together with the family. We work with families for up to a year, but more if needed. Even after a family no longer needs our support, they can still attend our groups and return as volunteers.

Vital - Our families need us. Over and over again families feedback that without us, they would have felt isolated, anxious and totally alone.

“Home-Start for me is like a corner of happiness”

How do we do it?

Our Volunteers - the backbone of HSC&I.

Our volunteers reflect the backgrounds, cultures and life experiences of the families we support. Our families trust us because our volunteers truly understand our families' situations and approach support with friendship and understanding. Our comprehensive 6 day training course equips every volunteer with knowledge on Listening Skills, Confidentiality, Diversity, Mental Health, Parenting Skills, Boundaries and Safeguarding.

This year we worked with 75 dedicated home-visiting volunteers who stood by our families' sides through all the challenges of parenthood.

Did you know that 3 of our new volunteers this year were previously parents we supported?

This year, our volunteers completed additional training in:

- Suicide Awareness
- Money Management
- Domestic Abuse Awareness
- First Aid

“My volunteer was so proactive - even on days I thought I had no energy in me. Home-Start have a different vibe - it's like working through a problem with a friend”



Our **STAFF**

We have a small but powerful team who are constantly finding new ways to build up our families and change lives. These are the people you want in your corner when it all feels too much; every single day they show up for our families and remind our parents how strong they are and that they are not alone.

“The best thing about Home-Start was the conversations with the staff. Being seen, heard and having someone present for me was very comforting.”

“I knew staff would always fight my corner. We were fighting that mould issue for almost 1 year but finally we got it repaired. I’m so grateful for Home-Start’s help.”

Our **BOARD**

Our board consists of **10** expert trustees who also sit on three separate sub-committees: Governance, Finance & Risk and Communications to ensure we have robust governance across all areas of the organisation.

We are proud that our board has the professional expertise of lawyers, accountants and nursery directors, but we are also committed to continually improving how well our board’s life experiences reflect that of our families. This approach allows vital diversity of thought when our committed and passionate board are making organisational decisions.

Did you know that **4** of our trustees were previously **home-visiting volunteers?**

Our **FUNDERS**

We would not be here without the financial support of our generous funders.

We would like **to thank:**

- Camden Strategic Partners
- City Bridge Trust
- The Mitchell Foundation
- Nationwide
- Garfield Weston
- Cripplegate
- Berkeley Homes North East London
- St Andrews Holborn Trust
- Cadent Centre for Warmth
- The Hospital Saturday Fund with Catalyst Partners for Health
- John Lyons
- London Catalyst
- Nespresso

Some of the **incredible ways** we **support families** to...

Provide the Best Start to Life

Neurological Music Therapy for children with **SEND**

Many families with neurodiverse children are facing the same challenge; there is no additional support for their child whilst they are awaiting a statutory autism assessment.

In some cases, this wait has been up to three years, leaving parents feeling overwhelmed and unequipped to make the right choices for their child. We teamed up with a music therapist to offer Neurological Music Therapy to 10 children under the age of 4 who were awaiting assessments. This innovative therapy uses rhythm and sensory activity to develop motor function skills and healthy coping behaviours. Vitally, this project also taught parents the skills to keep up the therapy at home too.

Dad Matters

The name says it all. Dad Matters. But we know that it can be hard for men to prioritise their needs as a Dad, which can cause anxiety and stress to become unmanageable.

Our brand new project seeks to bridge the gap in services traditionally targeted at mothers by engaging dads directly. Our dedicated Dad Matters Coordinator supports fathers and male carers to cultivate

successful relationships with their families, meet and share insights with other dads who may be struggling and learn about their role in their child's development.

“This service far exceeded my expectations, as I thought it would be centred around mums, but as a father, I felt valued. I had someone cheerful to offload to when times were bleak.”

Serene surroundings

This year, **104** of our supported families were living in unsuitable housing. Our home is where we start from; it is where childhood takes place.

Studies have shown that clutter can increase stress levels, make it difficult to focus and even take a toll on our relationships - three elements that are crucial to a child's development. A wonderful, local professional declutterer donates her time to us by tackling the cramped living situations and overwhelming rooms that some of our families are living in.

Communication Sessions

When two people are having difficulty communicating, it can end in conflict. Our communication sessions - most often facilitated between co-parents - discuss different ways of changing old negative patterns, learning to listen, and to be less critical of each other.

It is an opportunity for both people to be heard, and share, without judgement, to work together for the benefit of the child.

A special **thank you** to **The Winch** for their comprehensive **10 week Parenting Skills course** - which we referred **38** of our parents to this year.

School Readiness

Starting school can feel scary, for both parents and for children. Our volunteers support families in preparing for the transition to education by role-modeling important actions such as sitting down **1 on 1** with **a child** and working on an activity together, instigating creative play, reading stories, and talking to a child about what is happening around them.

Small things make a big difference, our volunteers even help with practical things like helping children get used to holding a pen, and supporting parents in understanding school routines.

Everything we do is designed to help children get the best start to education.

“I have even cried remembering everything that Home-Start has been for us.”

“You make me feel you are so trusting, you make me feel like everything will be ok. I love your positivity.”

“I can honestly say that I definitely wouldn't be so far along in my recovery process if it weren't for Home-Start.”



Some of the **incredible ways** we **support families** to...

Feel part of the Community

Community Links

They say it takes a village to raise a child - and we feel the same is true to support a community! We love working with local partners to pool our resources and put our heads together to create the most comprehensive, wrap-around support we can for our families.

Camden and Islington are two boroughs brimming with culture and activities for little ones, but the families we support were not accessing them.

Our families told us that they felt

*“anxious going to new places”,
“worried that people will judge me”
and “not sure it was meant for me”*

We responded by forging strong relationships with exciting community institutions and, through the unshakable trust that our families have in our staff and volunteers, steadily built their confidence to access the community that is out there.

This year we provided:

- 16 weeks of empowering art workshops for parents with the Foundling Museum
- A private exhibition viewing with our parents artwork on display
- 4 events with the British Library
- 23 visits to Kew Gardens
- 89 visits to London Zoo.

“Not having any friends with kids, and not being able to relate to other mums due to my traumatic experiences. I was feeling so lonely and isolated. After Home-Start’s first visit, I felt hopeful for the first time in months.”

In-house Support Groups

Our families trust us and know that being with **Home-Start Camden** and **Islington** means a judgement-free, relaxed environment. Therefore, we consider the first step in a family’s journey to integrate with the wider community, is to connect and bond with other **HSC&I** families, building a peer network and overcoming isolation together.

This year we hosted:

- 51 Coffee Mornings
- 14 Yoga Classes
- 2 one-stop-shops
- Sock Puppets and Bathbomb making workshops
- Birthday parties, a Christmas party and an Easter fun day and a Picnic

“Their warmth, kindness and complete lack of judging me for struggling gave me the courage to go to their coffee morning and I’m so glad I did. I met some lovely mums there, and has given me structure even on chaotic days.”

A special thanks to the **Nespresso team** who not only donated two coffee machines and all the coffee we could drink, but their **Camden retail staff** lent a hand at several of our family coffee mornings this year.

Thank you so much to **Marlborough Highways** for donating **£1000** worth of brand new Christmas presents for parents and children, and **200 Easter Eggs!**



Some of the **incredible ways** we **support families** to...

Survive the Cost of living crisis

40% of children in Camden and **47.5%** of children in Islington are living in poverty. The cost of living crisis saw our families struggling to provide the basics for their children. What used to be a tightening of resources towards the end of the month turned into a state of desperation as basic bills wiped out funds as soon as they arrived.

We responded in many ways:

- **We became a Foodbank referrer**
- **We provided £825 in supermarket vouchers**
- **We provided free wifi and laptops through our partners BT**
- **We provided 34 energy efficient slow cookers through our partners Cadent Gas**

Lets Recycle

During a time where necessities have become luxuries we have been on a mission to make sure no-one was just **“making do.”** Whether it was childrens’ beds, changing tables or pushchairs, if our families needed it, we took it to the community and sourced it. We were supported by a wonderful volunteer who drove around London, collecting these items and dropping them right at our families’ doors.

A huge **thank you** to all the parents at Abacus Ark who held three toy drives for us this year! Another special thank you to our volunteer delivery driver!

Warm Spaces, Friendly Faces

We knew that we wanted to provide a warm space as a respite from cold flats and sniffly noses, but we also wanted to provide a respite from the low mood it causes. To help parents connect with each other and their community, we took our families out to local restaurants for shared community meals.

We **welcomed:**

63 families to
8 community meals

“Such a nice environment, its so nice to be treated to lunch and coffee. Feel like a queen today.

*Home-Start.
takes care of
us sooo much.”*



Benefits Advice

Our trained Benefits Advice volunteer ensures that families understand the benefits process, and are accessing all of the financial support that they are entitled to.

Employment Pathway

We know that the parents we support are resilient, empathetic and experts at multitasking - all skills that will be highly valued in the workplace. Yet many of our supported parents, especially those who have taken a long career break to care for their family, struggle to find a job that values them and fits around their childcare needs. For our supported parents and our volunteers who are prioritising finding a career, we created the Employment Pathway.

“If it was not for HSCI I would not have got my degree. My FLM was my mentor and helped me believe in myself and now I have a degree and a high paid job.”

Two of our supported mums had the opportunity to step back into the workplace with complete flexibility and confidence. Leiho, a local social enterprise, offered a month-long paid work placement set up in our very own office where our parents already felt comfortable.

“Working with Leiho provided a sense of purpose and fulfilment. The opportunity for financial stability that comes with a job that empowered me to support myself and my loved ones.”

We want to **thank** the team at Nationwide for designing and delivering tailored Money Management training to our volunteers, staff and families.



H&ME START

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