

PREVENTING FAMILY POVERTY

First 12 month's evaluation April 2021 - March 2022



"I honestly don't know how I would have got through such a traumatic time without Home-Start's support and kindness.

Practical help such as the Foodbanks, support at home, support at Christmas and emotional support was what I needed and was so invaluable."

Home-Start Family

THE GROWING CRISIS

Grace Green , Home-Start West Berkshire Director

The Preventing Family Poverty project was created in the lead up to April 2021 when we recognised that a disproportionate amount of families were struggling to make ends meet following the global pandemic.

West Berkshire should be a borough where everyone has the chance of a decent and secure life. Instead, many families, a large proportion of them working families, are struggling to make ends meet. It became a heart-breaking aspect of our day to day work.

We had to act and so we developed a project that made maximising family income its focus. This is the evaluation of our first year of the project and with the cost of living crisis upon us we are pleased we can demonstrate the impact we have had and use our learning and experience to take on the challenge of the next months.



WHY MONEY MATTERS

Poverty means not being able to heat your home, pay your rent, or buy the essentials for your children. It means waking up every day facing insecurity, uncertainty, and impossible decisions about money. It means facing marginalisation – and even discrimination – because of your financial circumstances. The constant stress it causes can overwhelm people, affecting them emotionally and depriving them of the chance to play a full part in society. The reality is, almost anyone can experience poverty. Unexpected events such as bereavement, illness, redundancy or relationship breakdown are sometimes all it can take to push us into circumstances that then become difficult to escape.

Poverty puts considerable strain on family budgets and relationships. Children who grow up in low-income households have poorer mental and physical health, on average, than those who grow up in better-off families. . From an early age, children in poverty are more likely to score worse in tests of cognitive, social and behavioural development. At age five, children who have had high-quality childcare for two to three years are nearly eight months ahead in their literacy development than children who have not been in pre-school.

Key Statistics

**Number of families
engaged in the project:
32**

**Number of individuals
that have benefitted
from the project
127**

**Number of families
entitled to free school
meals
20**

MEASURING SUCCESS

Our aims for this project had three key priority areas:

- Maximising family income
- Supporting parental relationships
- Better parenting and child development

63% of families in this project are eligible for free school meals. Families are eligible for free school meals if they are on income support, job seekers allowance or if they are on Universal Credit with an annual income of less than £7,400. All the remaining families have also been identified as experiencing extreme financial hardship. We have supported 18% to return to work,

We have supported 100% of families to ensure they on the right in- and out-of-work benefits. 28% have been supported to access school uniform grants. 100% of families have been offered access to support services that help to provide food and child necessities, with 56% accessing the Foodbank and 50% accessing our Babybank or The Cowshed for older children's clothes.

Debt support and budgeting has been an important factor in this project with 100% of families offered assistance in this area. 15 volunteers had additional training in help families to save money on their energy bills. 38% of families have been referred to appropriate support services such as Citizen's Advice, Christian's Against Poverty Money Course and Connecting Communities in Berkshire for water and energy savings. 50% have had support with their housing situation.

56% of parents are separated from their children's other parent. We have supported parents to maintain good communication with their child's other parent. All families have been offered support to attend mediation but no parents have required this assistance.

53% of families have been supported with a home-visiting volunteer and 28% of families have also accessed our Family Groups to help with their parenting skills and encourage their child's development. 84% have had help with good parenting tips and techniques and 81% have employed positive reinforcement strategies. 100% of parents have been offered support to find high quality childcare or nursery settings. 8% needed support with 2 year old Early Years funding.



"If we were not able to refer to your service, we would have a lot of families that would continue to be in crisis and not access the support that your service offers. Knowing that when I have closed to a family that they have the support that Home-Start provides means that I can close with the knowledge that they are in good hands."

Targeted Intervention Officer



A CASE STUDY

Emma* sent us an email through our website in March 2021. She wrote, "I am a single mum of 4 children aged 13,11,5 & 1.... I don't have any support from anyone and have a history of depression. I feel really down and unable to cope . Obviously with everything being shut because of COVID like the family hubs and baby groups, health visitor appointments. I have no one to talk to.

I have now been housed by the council, as I currently live at my mums with the children. I am starting from scratch and have no money for furniture, white goods, carpets etc and no one to ask for financial help. everything is just becoming too much for me."

Amelia, the project coordinator got in touch with Emma and quickly assessed what support she needed. She was eligible for free school meals for the children and a grant for school uniform. Amelia also supported Emma with carpets for her new home and liaised with the Community Furniture project for furniture and The Cowshed to furnish the house with curtains. We helped to make the home safe by having one of our volunteers fit stairgates. The costs of moving home had still left Emma without any money for food so Amelia referred the family to the Foodbank.

Emma was having difficulty with her third child who kept being excluded from school. Amelia liaised with the school, referred the family to SENDIAS and supported Emma with Disability Living Allowance forms. Amelia helped support a new placement at more specialist school.

Emma told us, "The difference Home-Start has made to me is massive. I feel Home-Start, particularly Amelia, was so supportive and helpful. I still wouldn't have any carpets (6 months later) if it wasn't for her. She has helped me feel less isolated, especially with the problems Ben* was having at school."