

PEN PICTURE: Home Start UK: Tackling Adverse Childhood Experiences one family at a time

The early years, including the pre-birth period and extending up to age eight, are vital for a child's development. What goes on inside a family strongly determines the opportunities and life chances children have. Children who are raised in a stable, loving, family environment are more likely to have a positive and healthy future.

Home-Start UK in Scotland works with a network of 31 local independent Home-Start charities which focus on supporting over 3000 families a year with children in the early years. Our network trains volunteers, often people with parenting experience, to become the trusted source of support that too many parents lack.

At the heart of these relationships lies the importance of strengthening attachment – the loving bond between parent and child, which is vital to human wellbeing. We often help parents with practical matters such as finding good quality debt advice, healthy eating on tight budgets and combatting loneliness and social isolation. We also work to help them improve the way they manage their own feelings and behaviours. This helps them to create the calm, safe, predictable home learning environments where children can flourish.

We focus on enabling parents to be warm, consistent, nurturing and resilient carers. We cannot prevent children from experiencing adversity but we work with parents to minimise the damage children suffer if they grow up experiencing chronic stress. Sometimes this means helping to break cycles of intergenerational harm. Many parents seek our help because they know that overcoming challenges linked to their own Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) is a vital part of giving their children the best start in life.

Reducing stress in childhood matters because research shows a strong association between chronic stress in childhood and poor lifelong wellbeing. Experiencing adversity can lead to low achievement in education, early sexual experience, increased risk of offending, substance and alcohol misuse, poor physical and mental health and increased likelihood of becoming a victim of violence in adulthood. The good news is we can help make sure this does not happen. Every child needs at least one stable, caring adult in their lives. We cannot avoid all adverse childhood experiences but confident, caring, connected parents can protect their children from experiencing chronic stress.

"I had so many thoughts in my head. I couldn't sleep at night. Home-Start helps me a lot. I was free to talk to my volunteer and I can talk about the things I feared. She gives me hope. I am stronger because of Home-Start".



We have created a unique monitoring and evaluation system to record how every one of our families is coping with the problems they have identified. We collect information in four headline categories – parenting skills, parental wellbeing, children’s wellbeing and family management - and for 13 specific needs.

Parents are our partners in this process. This is what one mother told us about the impact of working with a Home-Start volunteer: ***“I had so many thoughts in my head. I couldn’t sleep at night. Home-Start helps me a lot. I was free to talk to my volunteer and I can talk about the things I feared. She gives me hope. I am stronger because of Home-Start”.***

Read our Social Impact Report here: <https://www.home-start.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=c0f7d46e-2a38-4a4e-b419-a8c5d8e2a047>