



An introduction to volunteering

INTRODUCTION

Hello! Thank you for contacting us with an interest in becoming a volunteer with Home-Start Angus. I'm sure you will have lots of questions about what we do and how we do it.

Over the past 28 years, Home-Start Angus has supported over 300 local people in Angus who have volunteered for us. If you have picked up this booklet, you are likely to still be at the stage of having lots of questions about your local Home Start – about the families who use our service and about what is expected of our volunteers. I hope this booklet will answer some of those questions. If you decide to take your interest further you will find out more during your Course of Preparation. If you haven't already received one, please ask for a sample programme which will give you more information on what is included on this course.

I hope you find this useful and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

WHAT IS HOME-START?

The very first Home-Start was set up in Leicester nearly 50 years ago in response to the needs of young families who lacked confidence to link into support services outside their homes. The idea was a very simple one - local people, with parenting experience were recruited as volunteers. They were given some initial preparation training and then sensitively matched to young family experiencing difficulties. They undertook to visit that family in their own home, on a regular basis and offer support, friendship and practical help until the family could cope without them.

Although a simple idea, it was soon seen to be a very effective one in preventing family crisis and breakdown and remains the ethos behind Home-Start today.

Following the success of that first local Home-Start, other communities looked to develop one themselves and so the idea began to "mushroom". A national body was formed to assist the development of local Home-Starts and ensure a shared understanding of good practice. The national organisation now offers training, information and guidance to around 220 local Home-Starts across the UK, around 30 of which are in Scotland.

Every Home-Start scheme is managed by a Board of local people who employ staff to run the organisation on a day-to-day basis. Home-Start Co-ordinators have responsibility for meeting families referred, recruiting and supporting volunteers and matching help to families.

HOME-START ANGUS

Home-Start Angus was launched in 1994, following the success of Home-Start schemes in Dundee and Perth. With the support of Home-Start UK, a steering group made up of professionals working with children and families and parents themselves worked hard and diligently over 2 years to secure funding to develop a scheme locally. In 1994, funding was allocated from Tayside Regional Council Social Work Department, (now Angus Council), and Tayside Health Board, who remain the core funders of Home-Start Angus today.

The original steering group held an inaugural meeting in September 1994 when the Home-Start constitution was adopted and the first Management Committee elected. A Co-ordinator and an Administrator were appointed and by March 1995 the very first group of Home-Start volunteers had been approved and matched to families in Arbroath.

In 2003 Home-Start Angus became a Company Limited by Guarantee and today the scheme is governed by a Board of Trustees.

WHAT DO THE STAFF DO?

The Manager, Audrey Thomson, is employed to manage the scheme on a day-to-day basis and line manages all other staff.

The Administrator Sandra Beattie together with Alison Duncan, our Finance Officer, is responsible for ensuring all administrative systems within Home-Start Angus run smoothly. Alison also acts as secretary to the Board of Trustees.

Our co-ordinators, Catherine Fletcher, Fiona McIntosh and Shona Arbuckle, are responsible for recruiting, training and supporting volunteers, assessing the needs of families who are referred to Home-Start Angus and matching them to volunteers.

Home-Start Angus also runs groups for families throughout Angus –

Tuesday – Brechin and Forfar

Wednesday – Montrose

Thursday – Arbroath

Friday – Arbroath

These groups are run by our co-ordinators and supported by creche workers Tracy Ross and Lynn Low. The staff always welcome 'an extra pair of hands' from Home-Start volunteers so if you are interested in working with groups, this may be an alternative volunteering opportunity for you! Once again – we'd love to hear from you if this is of interest.

WHAT DO VOLUNTEERS DO?

Home-Start volunteers offer a regular home-visiting service to young families who are experiencing difficulties or who feel they are not coping. During the home visits they offer support, friendship and practical help. In offering support Home-Start volunteers are alongside families doing things “with” and not “to” them. All of us in Home-Start recognise that bringing up young children is not easy and a little reassurance and praise can go a long way!

Home-Start volunteers develop a relationship with the family they visit. Time and understanding is shared. The offer of “friendship” in Home-Start has boundaries. Volunteers are not expected to give their addresses and phone numbers to families, it is rather a friendship that involves the volunteer being non-judgmental, a good listener and able to help parents enjoy the fun side of family life.

Home-Start volunteers are not “home-helpers.” The practical help they offer is very much about an extra pair of hands for feeding babies, pushing buggies, playing with toddlers and accompanying parents on shopping trips and outings to the park. Neither are Home-Start volunteers “baby-sitters”, although they do look after children when parents desperately need some time out, like any good friend would do. The support offered by a volunteer is flexible depending on the needs of the family and the skills of the volunteer.

WHO ARE HOME-START VOLUNTEERS?

Home-Start volunteers are local people in Angus who know what it is like to bring up children. We do not recruit “perfect parents” who have never made a mistake, (if indeed they exist!), but rather people who have encountered both good and bad times with their children and survived the experience.

Home-Start volunteers do not need any special training or skills it is instead their personal qualities that qualify them to do the “job.” If you feel the list overleaf applies to you, then you could be a volunteer with Home-Start Angus.

Volunteers should:

- Have parenting experience
- Demonstrate a sensitive and caring attitude towards others
- Have a non-judgmental attitude
- Be clear about the importance of confidentiality
- Be reliable
- Be committed and self-motivated
- Be a good listener
- Understand the need for support
- Have time and enthusiasm for Home-Start
- Have a warm and open personality
- Have a sense of fun!

HOW MUCH TIME IS INVOLVED?

Realistically, however much you may want to get involved with Home-Start Angus, unless you are able to commit 2-3 hours each week to visiting a family and linking into the scheme's support networks you will find it difficult to volunteer.

Most Home-Start volunteers visit the family they have been matched to once a week. Sometimes the visiting happens more frequently, perhaps when the family are going through a particularly difficult patch like bringing home new-born twins for example!

We like to feel that Home-Start is a flexible service, where the volunteer can respond to the changing needs of the family from time to time. This also works both ways, families understand that sometimes Home-Start volunteers have to cancel or change the time of a visit due to their own circumstances, when one of their own children are ill for example.

As well as visiting a family, Home-Start volunteers should have enough time to keep contact with the Co-ordinator who is supervising them and meet with other volunteers for support and on-going training.

Home-Start volunteers, however, are not expected to be "on call" to the family they are visiting. The scheme does not give out a volunteer's telephone number or address. Normally all contact with the volunteer by the family is made through the office.

DO HOME-START VOLUNTEERS NEED A CAR?

No. You don't need a car to visit families for Home-Start Angus. We offer our service to families right across the district and have groups of Home-Start volunteers in Arbroath, Brechin, Carnoustie, Montrose, Forfar, Kirriemuir and rural Angus. Many volunteers visit families in the town where they live. This may involve a bus ride, as we will not match a volunteer and family who live close to one another.

If you do have access to a car however, you would be offered the option of visiting a family in another town or perhaps an isolated family living in rural Angus. Home-Start volunteers who use their cars are fully reimbursed by the scheme. We pay a mileage rate for travel undertaken as a Home-Start volunteer. In fact volunteering for Home-Start does not involve any out of pocket expenditure at all. All we ask for on a voluntary basis is your time.

TRUSTEE VOLUNTEERS

Home-Start Angus is a Registered Charity and a Company Limited by Guarantee managed by a Board of Trustees. The Board also includes advisors from our funding bodies such as Angus Council Social Work Department and Tayside NHS Board, representatives from other agencies working with young families in Angus and volunteers. Some Trustees also work as home-visiting volunteers and can represent the views of those working directly with families at an executive level. Some are parents who have used the Home-Start service themselves.

The main responsibility of the Board of Trustees include:

- **Legal duties**, ensuring the company pursues its objectives as set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association and meets the requirements of the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).
- **Managerial duties**, the employment and supervision of staff and ensuring finances are properly managed.
- **Strategic decisions**, agreeing on planning, development and new practice policies within the organisation.

The Board of Trustees meet every 6 to 8 weeks, usually on a Wednesday evening between 6.00 pm and 7.30 pm at the Arbroath office. Trustees also have an opportunity to work on a variety of different subgroups, for example a “staffing” subgroup and a “finance” subgroup currently meets monthly out with full Board meetings.

Further information about becoming a volunteer Trustee on the Board of Home-Start Angus is available from the Arbroath office or by calling 01241 431131 or e mailing info@homestartsangus.org.uk.

WHO ARE THE FAMILIES?

The Home-Start service is available for any pre-birth family or families with at least one child under the age of 5 in Angus who are experiencing difficulties. The only time Home-Start will say “no” to a family is when we have not got an available or suitable volunteer for the family or the difficulties faced by the family are too complex for us to help them with.

The needs of the families who use our service are wide and varied. Parenting is never an easy task whatever the circumstances. The support of a Home-Start volunteer can help a family cope when:

- They feel isolated
- There are relationship difficulties between parents
- There are children with learning difficulties or special needs
- Parents are ill or disabled
- There is a multiple birth
- Mothers have post-natal depression
- Parents lack confidence
- They are new to the area
- There has been a bereavement
- The family is headed by a lone parent

The list is endless and includes difficulties many of us involved as staff and volunteers with Home-Start faced when our children were small.

There isn't a typical Home-Start family!

HOW DO FAMILIES ASK FOR HELP?

The majority of families in Angus who are visited by a Home-Start volunteer contact the scheme through their Health Visitor. Health Visitors are seeing parents with pre-school children on a regular basis and can often identify if parents are going through a difficult patch. They will talk to the family about Home-Start and then with their permission, make a “referral” to the scheme.

We do however, have an open referral policy in Home-Start and anyone can contact the scheme about a family. About 1 in 5 families contact us themselves and that figure grows each year as more parents find out about us, often by talking to another family who have met a volunteer.

However, it is not easy to ask for help and accept a stranger into your home and volunteers should have that uppermost in their minds when they meet a family through Home-Start.

HOW ARE THE VOLUNTEERS SUPPORTED?

The key role of a Home-Start Co-ordinator is to support volunteers. This involves:

- An induction course which outlines the policies and practice of the scheme, the expectations of volunteers and some of the situations they might come across
- Full preparation of a volunteer prior to meeting the family they have been matched to, with the option to say “no” without any pressure
- One to one meetings with a Co-ordinator every 6-8 weeks
- Responsive support from the scheme when it is necessary. Volunteers have Co-ordinator contact numbers if there is something they need to discuss out of office hours
- On-going training events
- Social activities and fun

It is important to remember that volunteers are not on their own in supporting families. Co-ordinators sensitively match the skills and experience of the volunteer to the needs of the family. It is important that the volunteer looks forward to the visits as much as the family.

WHAT DOES THE COURSE OF PREPARATION INVOLVE?

A typical Course of Preparation in Home-Start Angus would involve 8 three-hour sessions. Each session would cover a different topic relevant to volunteering with Home-Start. The courses are informal and friendly and don't involve any writing or tests! We call them courses of "preparation" rather than "training" courses, as we don't teach people new skills we enhance the ones they already have.

The courses involve group discussions and activities, videos, case studies and handouts. Don't worry you won't be asked to do any "role play" or share anything you don't want to!

The topics covered include:

- Family life and parenting
- Listening skills
- Confidentiality in Home-Start
- Child development and play
- Equal Opportunities
- Other services for families
- Limits and boundaries of the Home-Start relationship
- Child protection guidelines
- Support, commitment and personal safety

WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

We hope that what you have found out so far has increased your interest. If that is the case the next step is to let us know! Give the office a call or e mail us and one of the Co-ordinators will arrange to meet with you to discuss your formal application and the next Course of Preparation. These are held at different times all over Angus and hopefully there will be one taking place soon that you will be able to attend.

Volunteering with Home-Start Angus can be challenging, but it is also good fun! Here are some comments from volunteers:

“Things are working out with my Home-Start family. I am enjoying the work very much. Mum has had a few ups and downs and we have talked it over. We talk a lot and I think that is what is helping her.”

“The service that Home-Start staff and volunteers provide is of great value to many families. The staff are very friendly and make you feel at ease. The Preparation Course was done very well and went into a great deal of subjects, which comes in useful to help you and the families.”

“I appreciate the flexibility and consideration shown to the individual needs of each family and the volunteers. On-going support and training days are a valuable source of information and provide a means of networking and promoting the feeling of accomplishment in many small ways. I believe Home-Start Angus does an excellent job in nurturing both family and volunteer, there is always someone to turn to who will listen and be supportive.”

“Being a volunteer has given me the confidence to complete my HNC at Angus College and also to begin my degree in Community Education. The endless support has enabled me to visit my families and encourage them to move forward in their own lives.”

“Over the years many friendships have developed between the family and the volunteer. Speaking from my own experiences the volunteer is warmly received when you go on your weekly visits. The volunteer is often the only person the mum can confide in, as they are a friend and not someone in authority. It is lovely watching the children grow into confident individuals who have so many different qualities to offer.”

“In the short time that I have been visiting my family I did not realize the benefits my visits would have on their general well-being. It is rewarding for me to see positive changes happening through my visits and contact with them. They look forward to our time together and we have bonded well.”

“What I get out of being a Home-Start volunteer is the confidence and the ability of helping and meeting people who have been in difficult relationships, and being able to understand, listen and support.”

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