

Application for Grant from Homestart Weywater

Almost everyone knows that being a parent is not always easy! However, while most of us are fortunate enough to be able to cope fairly well, for other people the process is not nearly as simple.

Some families face challenges, either long-term or short-term, which make life extremely difficult. The parents, through no fault of their own, cannot offer a good example to follow and this can result in poor prospects for their children as they grow.

Just imagine the effect on a young child of a household where there is domestic abuse or severe financial hardship, where the parents suffer with mental or physical health difficulties, where there is no emotional warmth or mental stimulation, or where there is chaos and a lack of stability and security. It cannot be surprising that many children who experience this sort of lifestyle in their early years do less well at school than their peers and often grow up to have mental health problems themselves or go on to repeat the pattern when they come to have their own families.

However a bad start in life does not have to mean an unsuccessful adulthood. The Duchess of Cambridge is a strong supporter of encouraging strength and resilience in early childhood in order to prepare children to lead happy and successful lives. After all, **childhood can't wait.**

Home-Start Hampshire supports families across six local authorities. However locally raised funds can be restricted for us to use in a specific area. Our area, under East Hants Authority, is called Weywater and covers Alton, Bordon & Whitehill and Liphook as well as all the surrounding villages.

It is well known that dealing with potentially damaging situations as soon as possible is better for everyone involved - and it is also up to ten times more cost effective to support a young family with difficulties than it is for the state to intervene at a later stage. (Source: Aldaba and EIF analysis of Department for Education, Section 251.)

We offer support, both practical and emotional, to families facing real difficulties. Through the non-judgemental approach of our volunteers, families are empowered to overcome their difficulties and gain confidence and resilience in order to grow stronger for the future.

Families are referred to us by social workers, doctors, teachers, health visitors or anyone who recognises their need for support, or they can self-refer. Our volunteers are fully trained and supervised and each is carefully matched with a family, with children up to the age of 11, who would benefit from their help. The level and type of support provided is discussed in advance and targets or outcomes are agreed, whether this is a short-term practical intervention to get through a difficult period or a longer relationship of up to 9 months to support a family as they grow and develop. We also run two pre-school groups which provide help and advice, as well as offering a friendly approach to parents feeling isolated and an opportunity for children to gain valuable social skills.

We have a simple business model – as described above – which does not cost a lot. We do not give money or goods to our families, although we do provide advice and signposting if they need this sort of help. However we do employ three part-time staff - a Family Coordinator, a Group Coordinator and an Office Manager. We also hire office space and pay for certain training and development for our volunteers. Home-Start UK provides certain services for us, such as legal protection, compliance etc for which we pay an annual subscription.

As you can imagine this is a particularly difficult year for our charity, as it is for so many. Our regular fundraising activities have been curtailed because of the coronavirus pandemic so our income will be impacted, yet the families we support need us more than ever. Isolation is increased when it is so difficult to get out, family tensions are worsened when children cannot attend school and become bored and frustrated, domestic abuse in all its forms can escalate and financial difficulties add stress to everyday living. In addition, those living with mental health problems such as anxiety or depression are finding it even harder to manage their concerns. Our amazing volunteers, although they may not be able to visit in person, are keeping in touch by phone or social media channels to continue their essential support.

Your donation to our work, so important in any year, is vital now.