

## Home-Start report & request to Witney Town Council

August 2023

**We are appealing to Witney Town Council to continue financial support for Home-Start's service for young children and families in the town.**

In this very challenging fundraising climate, we are at real risk of having to reduce our early intervention, preventative support that helps create secure attachment, community connection, and learning opportunities for Witney's next generation. **We very much want to sustain the services we have built over the last five years, but cannot do this without your support.**

We are deeply rooted locally, with our 4 weekly sessions for children under 5, on Smiths Estate, at the Methodist Church, and other venues, plus twice weekly free summer holiday activities we ran in local parks attracting 40-50 children per session. We are extremely cost-effective, delivering this support with a team of local volunteers and our Witney Group Coordinator. In addition to groups, we provide home-visiting support to families too.

The Town Council benefits from having Home-Start, as a small-medium sized skilled local charity, deliver this work. We are able to fundraise beyond the Town, but it is increasingly difficult to secure grants from national funders, as they focus on areas of higher deprivation. We receive no multi-year statutory funding currently.

**We are asking for a grant of £10,000 towards our total cost of £39,500 for our group work** (our home-visiting support is separately costed). As local families testify, we are an essential part of the service mix needed locally, intrinsically linked to your desire to address the needs of young people locally.

*"Early childhood represents one of the best investments we can make for the long-term health, wellbeing and happiness of our society. Our future outcomes, whether they be academic, economic or health related (including mental health), are profoundly shaped by our first five years. Yet the Royal Foundation's landmark public survey on early childhood..revealed that recognition of the importance of the early years is low."* Big Changes Start Small, Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood, 2021

Please read our report on activities in the last 12 months, and testimony from local families to illustrate the levels of complexity of need we serve. We would be happy to provide more detail on any aspect of this request.





## 224 Witney families & 281 children support by Home-Start in 2022-2023



**Little Splashers Baby Group** – weekly for under 1s, at Witney Methodist Church

**NEW in 2022 – Puddle Jumpers** – weekly for 0-5s, Ceewood Hall, Smiths Estate. Included free healthy lunch.

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**PEEP Learning Together Groups** – evidence-based 6-week programme for children and families facing high levels of anxiety and isolation, including one at Windrush Primary, The Witney Hotel for refugee families moved from detention, and a course for younger parents.

**NEW in 2023 – Nature Day** at Smiths Estate, May Half Term

**10 Free Summer Fun Days** in August at Burwell Recreation Ground and Oxlease Park. Included games, craft, messy fun, free snack and lunch, baby facilities and activities for older children.

**Other special sessions** in partnership at Cogges Farm and Bridewell Gardens, through the year.

**Outreach and 1:1 support** to children and families who are vulnerable (high anxiety and complex needs, for whom we are a first point of engagement with support). See below.

**Support with hardship needs** making applications for grants (e.g. for beds, white goods), referrals to food and baby banks.

### Plans for 2023-2024

We want to be able to continue this successful programme in 2023-4, adapting as we have to date, in response to changing needs.

We will continue our focus and expertise in engaging and supporting the most vulnerable families, including those groups recognised to have been worst-affected by Covid (single parents, black and minority communities, disabled parents and children, those with pre-existing health and mental health needs, being key examples).

## Family story

### WITNEY FAMILY ATTENDING GROUPS AND RECEIVING OUTREACH SUPPORT

Low-income family, both parents have mental health issues, and all four children have mental and/or physical health challenges – some very serious. One child has attempted suicide on more than one occasion and has a referral to CAMHS. The other three children have challenges include ADHD, autism and issues around prematurity including developmental delay and selective mutism. Dad had to reduce his working hours to help with the youngest child who needs constant care. This has put the family under even greater financial strain. The family were overwhelmed and isolated. They rarely went out because they were concerned about exposing their children to judgment.

Mum tried attending one of our groups, but it was too much for her. Jan suggested some 1:1 support in the family home. We have been supporting the family with practical help and emotional support for just over a year including through:

- Weekly home-visits
- Supporting the family at professional meetings
- Helping family find a home with an extra bedroom, and apply for DLA
- Working closely with school and convincing them to apply for EHCP
- Facilitating/referring to local food and baby banks
- Gained grants from hardship funds to get beds and a fridge freezer
- Texts/calls to encourage and support group attendance

The family and children have grown in confidence and now attend our free groups and summer activities – all within walking distance of their home.

“Home-Start has helped us more than anyone official.” Mum

“Look at this!” Youngest child on playing in mud at Burwell Recreation Ground during our summer activities. The first words we have ever heard him speak outside the home.

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## Guardian Angel

My past relationships haven't been good. I was on my own for a long while before I got with my youngest's dad. Same as with the others it was good to start off with, but it ended in bad violence, where he ended up really physically hurting me, and the police got involved. He hasn't been around since.

I was in a bit of a state back then, I was on my own with my three girls, and I really didn't know what to do. One of the school mums told me about the baby group Home-Start was running. I thought it would help to meet people and she said she'd come along with me, but when I went there, I just broke down. It was far too overwhelming for me - too many people, too much in my face. I was experiencing anxiety and depression and everything else, so the people at Home-Start suggested I speak to Lisa who provided me with some 1:1 support.

Then I did a course they were running supporting mums who had been abused. That helped me learn to deal with things. And Lisa kept coming out to see me weekly and helping me out with different stuff.

After that I got connected with one of the Home-Start volunteers, Susan. And that's been really, really good. She's just been so supportive, and we've built up a great relationship. I haven't got any family to support me or anything - my mum died, and I haven't seen my dad since I was young and don't have anything to do with him. So it's been nice to have someone to fall back on, someone on my side who can help me build up my confidence. Emotionally sometimes I just need someone to vent to or talk about things with, and knowing someone's there for me, and that they'll be in touch to make sure I'm OK is really nice.

Then there's the practical stuff too. I've had a big problem with my gas and electric going on for months. I was making phone calls every day and getting nowhere and it was causing me a hell of a lot of stress. The kids were freezing and I couldn't even cook them dinner. It was just a nightmare to be honest, and Susan's really helped me

with sorting that out. She helped me with citizen's advice too when I had a bit of a crisis situation and helped me get funding for a new oven – it's stopped me feeling totally overwhelmed.

Susan's helped me with my middle daughter too. She's got really bad confidence issues because her dad left when she was very young and she's had problems at school and stuff. Susan's helped me get her into clubs and stuff like theatre and dance, which I can't afford to pay for. That's really helping her.

She's been like my guardian angel really.

My life hasn't been easy from square one, and it's all just built up. I was in a very bad way - no confidence, didn't want to go out and all sorts. I've been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder which means I just can't deal certain situations.

I've put myself in hospital through overdoses. I used to feel like I had nothing, that I was a rubbish mum, and I would act irrationally, waking up in hospital and feeling absolutely sick to the stomach thinking 'What have I done?' 'Why did I do that to my children?'. The thing is at the time I'd just think that I was no good for them and that they didn't need me – just awful feelings.

I haven't done that since I've been with Home-Start. Knowing I've had someone looking out for me has stopped me. I mean I've had my ups and downs, but I've not taken an overdose or anything. Sometimes I've thought 'Oh god I just can't cope with this situation' but then I've had my Home-Start people to fall back on. I've phoned them and they've said 'Look, it's OK, I'm here' sort of thing. It's all about having the relationship with them and trust, and that's something I struggle with a lot due to my past.

The support I've had from Home-Start has built up my confidence a hell of a lot. I wouldn't have been able to speak like this before. Wendy my Home-Start Coordinator said I seem totally different to when she first met me. It's changed me so much.

*Names have been changed to protect privacy.*

## Funding Need

The total cost of our group work in Witney is around £39.5K/year. In addition, our 1:1 home-visiting services in Witney and West Oxfordshire cost around £59K/year.

This year, we have the following income for our group work:

£6,000	WODC
£5,000	Witney Town Council – ½ of 2022 grant carried forward
£9,000	The Henry Smith Charity
£2,500	Cottsway
£500	<u>Waitrose Witney</u>

**£16,500**      **Funding gap for 2023-4**

The funding climate is tougher than it has ever been. We are pro-active in our fundraising from a range of sources, but we still have a worrying funding gap for 2023/24.

Over the last few years Witney Town Council's contributions have been hugely significant and played a vital part in our success, helping to leverage other income.

The cost of a failure to invest in our youngest children and their parents is paid not only by individuals whose outcomes and happiness are compromised; failure to invest is also ruinously expensive for society. One striking example is provided by the research of Bauer et al which reveals the average cost to society of one case of perinatal depression is around £74,000, of which £23,000 relates to the mother and £51,000 relates to impacts on the child.

“Every £1 invested in quality early care and education saves taxpayers up to £13 in future costs,” Oxfordshire School Readiness Strategic Plan, Oxfordshire County Council, July 2020

The earliest years makes the biggest impact on long-term outcomes and happiness. We have been so heartened and impressed that Witney Town Council has understood the financial and human value of investing in the Early Years. By ensuring a good start in life for Witney's babies and youngest children you have shown leadership and foresight, investing in the future of the town and its people. Our groups and home-visiting support are free, ensuring everyone gets a chance to thrive.

It cannot be overstated how important your support is. If funding is reduced there will be an attendant reduction in what we can offer to families and the youngest residents of Witney.