



2025 – 2026

Annual Report

Opening doors for families across
Trafford, Salford & Wigan

**HOME
START**
Trafford,
Salford & Wigan

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OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE

256

families supported at home, with 456 children

594

Salford parents supported with feeding their babies

107

home-visiting volunteers, including 49 newly trained

98%

of families who gave feedback said Home-Start made a difference

7,024

times we helped a family access a service

7,557

children supported since we began in 1999

Who we are and what we do

HOW DID IT ALL START?

Home-Start was founded in Leicester in 1973 by Margaret Harrison MBE. It went nationwide in 1981, and Home-Start International followed in 1998.

Home-Start Trafford was formed in 1999 as a voluntary organisation. It now runs as a charitable company, strategically managed by a Board of Trustees who are all members of the local community. We extended our reach into Salford in January 2012 and into Wigan in January 2019.

We have a relatively small staff team and an army of dedicated, skilled volunteers. All of them have their own experience of parenting or family life, and they visit families in their own homes for 2 to 3 hours each week. Every volunteer is safely recruited, trained and supervised before being matched with a family.



WHAT OUR HOME-VISITING VOLUNTEERS DO

Home-Start Trafford, Salford & Wigan provides early, relational, volunteer-led support, mainly focused on the early years. Our volunteers give their time, a listening ear and practical encouragement, often when families are just beginning to struggle. They offer friendship and an extra pair of hands, and can help parents to:

- feel less isolated and more confident as parents
- get out of the house, whether that's to appointments or a trip to the park
- access community services
- promote their children's wellbeing, play and early learning
- strengthen the bond between parent and child
- talk through mild to moderate mental health or relationship difficulties
- manage the household, the budget and children's behaviour
- cope while recovering from an illness or operation

Each family gets a tailor-made mix of practical and emotional support that builds on the skills parents already have. Our aim is to reduce stress and prevent crisis and breakdown. Volunteers work alongside parents, who are always present during visits. They don't provide childcare, school runs, transport or cleaning, and they can't influence housing decisions, but they can help families find the right people who can.

WHO IS IT FOR?

Our core service is for families who are finding it hard to cope, at an Early Help level, and who live in:

Trafford with at least one child under 19

Salford with at least one child under 2

Wigan and Leigh with at least one child under 2

MORE THAN HOME-VISITING

Alongside our core family support service, we run other projects that some families may benefit from, including Parent Infant Mental Health support, Counselling, Infant Feeding Peer Support in Salford, the Imagination Library, and an ethnographic Voices project in Trafford.

REQUESTING SUPPORT

Families can refer themselves, or be referred by a professional, through our short online form at **hsts.org.uk/referral-form**. In Trafford, professionals also need to complete a Strengths and Needs Form, which has replaced the Early Help Assessment. For Infant Feeding Peer Support in Salford, use our infant feeding referral form at **hsts.org.uk/infant-feeding**.

Chair's Report

This report covers the year to the end of March 2026. My last three annual reports began by referencing the ever-increasing level of challenges that our staff team and families have faced. This theme very much continues to be the case.

The now seemingly never-ending cost of living crisis and the continuing reduction in the provision of local authority services have resulted in an inexorable rise in the number and indeed complexity of needs facing the families we support. It is also important to remind ourselves that, as with many families across the country, members of our own staff team have also been impacted.

Our core objective is unchanged. We aim to help give every child of families referred to us the best start in life by continuing to deliver our home visiting model, i.e. providing face-to-face practical, non-judgmental support, guidance and friendship. The volunteer board of trustees are humbled by the commitment and resourcefulness of our highly professional staff team and wonderful volunteers who provide this vital day-to-day assistance with support.

I will never tire of saying that the highlight of our monthly volunteer board trustees' meetings are the detailed case studies brought to us by the staff team. These case studies provide us with a direct and detailed insight into the effectiveness of the team between the staff and volunteers who truly are changing lives and prospects for the future.

We always ask supported families to provide us with feedback and the majority do. Invariably we see that the Home-Start team make a particularly positive difference to the families in what continue to be extremely trying and stressful circumstances for them. This direct feedback from both our families and referrers rightly gives the whole team a huge sense of pride and achievement. In addition, many of the families that we support put themselves forward to help Home-Start in the future.

850 families

supported this year: 256 through home visiting, up from 247 last year, and 594 through our Infant Feeding Peer Support service in Salford.

Our high-quality volunteer training has resulted in us recruiting and training a further 49 new home visiting volunteers over the last year, and 7 new Infant Feeding Peer Support volunteers.

Over the last year we have made further progress in several areas:

- Our volunteer trustee team have been further strengthened with the addition of significant experience in SEND.
- Our infant feeding peer support team now provides a universal service to expectant and new parents, both remotely and via drop-ins across the borough of Salford.
- We have further refined our digital back-office system, which helps us to maximise the professional team's time, so allowing a greater focus on supporting our volunteers and families.

Our sincere thanks are again due to our highly professional and resourceful staff team, inspirational volunteers and ever supportive board of volunteer trustees.

Finally, we continue to value the financial support we receive from our partners, in particular W H Howard, Greystone Financial Services, the Eric Wright Charitable Trust, the Broom Family Trust, the Henry Smith Charity and the Garfield Weston Foundation. Special mention should also be made of the staff, volunteers, trustees and their friends and family who have taken part in various fundraising activities over the last year.

Thank you all!

Neil Peden
Chair

CEO's Report

Every family we meet has their own story, and this year many of those stories have been harder than ever. Families across Trafford, Salford and Wigan have faced deeper and more complex challenges. Yet time and again, the simple act of someone knocking on the door every week, listening and caring, has made a real difference.

In 2025/26, we supported 456 children from 256 families through our home-visiting family support. Behind every number is a family doing their best in difficult circumstances. We supported parents struggling with their own mental health or their bond with their baby (193 families), parents who felt isolated and alone (172), and lone parents carrying the load by themselves (122). We also supported families facing worklessness (90) and housing worries (84), families caring for a child with additional needs (73), and a growing number of refugee and asylum-seeking families (25) building new lives far from home.

In Salford, our Infant Feeding Peer Support team supported 594 parents with feeding their babies, and in February 2026 became a universal service, reaching out to every new parent in Salford.

None of this happens without our volunteers. Over the year, 49 new home-visiting volunteers and 7 new Infant Feeding Peer Support volunteers trained to join us, giving their time freely to families they had never met. Like many charities, we have felt the pressures on volunteering, and our total number of home-visiting volunteers fell to 107. Finding and supporting more people who are willing to give a few hours a week will be a priority in the year ahead.

We are also proud that families' voices are shaping local services. Since 2023, Trafford has commissioned us to make sure that parents, carers and babies help shape the local Start for Life and Family Hub offer during the first 1,001 days. Our Voices project reached 424 families, and 261 of them shared their experiences of local services, including many diverse and seldom-heard families. What they told us has directly informed commissioning decisions and service design, including Trafford's Family Hub Minimum Offer, enhanced infant feeding support, more inclusive community activities and more family-friendly public spaces. We are delighted that the project has been recommissioned for a further two years, with a new focus on slightly older children.

"Hubs will open many doors, but some families need someone beside them to walk through."

LOOKING AHEAD

Through the Families First reforms and the government's investment in Best Start Family Hubs, every area is working towards earlier, whole-family support, which is what Home-Start has always offered.

For a parent who is anxious, isolated or unsure where to turn, the first step is often the hardest. Our volunteers take that step with them, starting on their own doorstep. Families tell us that Home-Start feels different: less formal, less intimidating, and from someone in their own community. With volunteers who between them speak 16 languages, and with parent-infant mental health at the heart of everything we do, we are well placed to be that bridge. We look forward to working with partners to make home-visiting support part of the Family Help and Best Start in Life Family Hub offers in Trafford, Salford and Wigan. Securing longer-term funding to make that possible remains our key priority.

THANK YOU

Above all, I want to say thank you to our staff team, our remarkable volunteers, our trustees, funders and partners. Most of all, thank you to the families who open their doors to us and let us into their lives. It is a privilege to walk alongside you.

Kathryn Eckersley
CEO

Family Support Referrers

We received 260 referrals for family support this year, the highest in five years. That's up 14.5% on last year (227), and well above the 217 and 218 we received in 2022/23 and 2023/24.

Referral source	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	5-year trend
Self referrals	47 19.2%	43 19.8%	38 17.4%	44 19.4%	54 20.8%	
Health visitors	63 25.7%	40 18.4%	33 15.1%	47 20.7%	51 19.6%	
Other health	28 11.4%	20 9.2%	16 7.3%	34 15.0%	41 15.8%	
Family Hubs / Children's Centres / Starting Well	25 10.2%	23 10.6%	24 11.0%	17 7.5%	31 11.9%	
Social workers	17 6.9%	12 5.5%	12 5.5%	16 7.0%	27 10.4%	
Other social services	22 9.0%	43 19.8%	59 27.1%	37 16.3%	17 6.5%	
Midwives	10 4.1%	8 3.7%	16 7.3%	11 4.8%	14 5.4%	
School	14 5.7%	12 5.5%	10 4.6%	11 4.8%	13 5.0%	
Other	19 7.8%	16 7.4%	10 4.6%	9 4.0%	12 4.6%	
GP	—	—	—	1 0.4%	—	
Total referrals	245	217	218	227	260	

WHAT STANDS OUT

More families are coming to us directly. For the first time in five years, self-referrals were our largest single source, with 54 families (20.8%). They have risen for two years running, from 38 to 44 to 54, which suggests word of mouth and our presence in local communities are making a difference.

Health colleagues remain key partners. Health visitors referred 51 families (19.6%), our largest professional source. Together with midwives and other health professionals, health colleagues referred 106 families, 41% of all referrals.

Family Hubs, Children's Centres and Starting Well referrals bounced back, rising from 17 to 31 families (11.9%).

Referrals from social workers rose to 27 families (10.4%), up from 16 last year, while referrals from other social services (which included the Trafford Team Together approach that resulted in a huge increase in 2023/24) fell to 17 (6.5%). School and other community referrals held steady, at 13 (5.0%) and 12 (4.6%) families.

WHAT THIS TELLS US

Families are referred to us through a good balance of routes: parents reaching out themselves, and professionals in health, early help and social care who know and trust our support.

Connecting families

7,024

times we helped a family find, contact or reach a service, 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026

Discussed options about services

3,460



Provided information about a service

803



Accompanied a family to a service

294



Researched or contacted a service

1,813



Made a referral to a service

366



Delivered essential items

288



"If I hadn't received support from Home-Start, I think I would have faced more difficulties managing daily challenges. Their help provided guidance and resources that made a big difference."

Parent

Family Support

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

256

families: 128 Trafford,
92 Salford, 36 Wigan

173

families supported by a
Coordinator and
volunteer

62

families supported one-
to-one by Family
Support Workers

21

Salford families
supported through Dad
Matters, nearly double
last year's 11

Since we began in 1999, we have supported **7,557 children from 3,645 families**. That's roughly the same as the entire population of Partington.

Just over a third of the families we supported (34%) were from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds, and 26 families were referred while mum was pregnant. A block of support with a Coordinator and volunteer lasts around 5½ months on average, and with a Family Support Worker around 3½ months. 24 families needed more than one block of support.

IMPACT

Families whose support ended with a completed review who reported an improvement in their self-assessed coping scores, 2025/26

FAMILY MANAGEMENT

85.6%

★ **137 Families Improved**

Routine, organisation & stress
management

PARENTS WELLBEING

76.3%

★ **122 Families Improved**

Parental mental health &
self-esteem

PARENTING SKILLS

75.0%

★ **120 Families Improved**

Parenting confidence & bonding
strategies

CHILDREN'S WELLBEING

72.5%

★ **116 Families Improved**

Emotional resilience & childhood
growth

This year, 60 of the 160 families whose support ended with a completed review shared feedback with us. **98%** said Home-Start had made a difference to their family, **98%** would recommend us, and **97%** felt involved in shaping their support. Remarkably, **68%** said they would be interested in becoming a volunteer themselves.

When we asked what we could do better, most families told us there was nothing they would change. Where they did make suggestions, they wanted their support to last longer ("I wish it was longer than 6 months") and wished they had found us sooner.

"Home-Start has truly made a life-changing difference to me and my family. Their support has been invaluable, both emotionally and financially. With the challenges of raising triplets, I couldn't manage without the kindness and assistance they provide."

Parent

Professionals told us the same. All 25 professionals who gave feedback this year, from health, education, social care and housing, said our support made a difference, were satisfied with the service and would recommend us. 24 of the 25 (96%) said Home-Start had stopped a family's needs from increasing.

"The Home-Start service is wonderful and provides support to families that do not always meet the threshold for social care involvement. Providing this support can prevent families escalating to social care and can really offer the early intervention that they need."

Health Visitor, WWL 0-19 Service

Ten professionals made suggestions this year, and their main request was more capacity rather than any change to the service: more volunteers and staff, so more families can be supported. A few also asked for longer support for families with complex needs, and a wider age range in Salford.

More than family support

Alongside our home-visiting support, we run a growing range of projects that reach families, and the professionals around them, in different ways.

Parent–Infant Mental Health Workforce Training

Since May 2023, we have co-delivered parent–infant mental health training with Salford's 0–19 Health Visiting Service and PAIRS. It builds on more than nine years of NHS-funded PIMH volunteer training in Salford. By March 2026, **144 practitioners** had been trained, from health visitors and midwives to social workers and voluntary sector partners. After the training, their confidence in supporting perinatal mental health rose from an average of **4.5 to 8.5 out of 10**.

"The information shared helped me to feel confident to talk about mental health at visits and with colleagues."

Training participant

Counselling

With funding from Cheadle Royal Hospital Trust, we have continued to support neurodivergent parents with moderate to severe mental health needs. That includes practical help with paperwork, diagnosis and routines, and trauma-focused counselling with specialist counsellors in partnership with CFC. **20 families** received enhanced support and **12 parents** began counselling. Every parent who has completed counselling so far has seen their mental health improve, with symptoms reducing from moderate to mild.

"I am now able to regulate my thoughts and feelings better, allowing myself to be able to be there more for my family and myself."

Parent

Dad Matters, Salford

This year our Dad Matters service supported **21 dads** in Salford and helped make fathers more visible across local services. That included meeting new dads at birthing centres, hospitals and infant feeding drop-ins, and sharing the importance of including dads through early help and PIMH training. The project came to an end in March 2026, but what we learned about engaging dads continues to shape our work.

Voices

Our ethnographic project, commissioned by Trafford, makes sure parents, carers and babies help shape local Start for Life and Family Hub services. It has reached **424 families**, and their views have directly shaped Trafford's Family Hub offer. The project has since been recommissioned for two more years.

Imagination Library

Through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, this year we raised enough funds to register **80 preschool children** from the families we support to receive a free book through their door every month.

"As a parent of four, it is hard to split time between all the children every day, no matter how hard I try. When their new books arrive, we make the time to sit and read them together, and it is so special."

Parent

Early Steps

Start your career in early years



HOME
START

Trafford,
Salford & Wigan





Trailblazer: opening up volunteering

From October 2025 to March 2026, with a grant from Trafford Council's Trailblazer EIT programme, we launched Early Steps: a free foundation course for residents thinking about a career in early years, whether starting out or returning after a break. No qualifications or experience are needed, and the course combined eight short online modules with two in-person training days. Working with St John's Centre, Rehoboth, Bethel Church, Talking Therapies and DALs interpreting service, we removed barriers by providing interpreters and help with IT and DBS applications. We engaged **35 residents**, including people new to the UK, people looking for work experience, and people rebuilding their confidence. **14 completed the course** and 11 told us they felt less isolated. 5 went on to volunteering or work experience, and 1 into employment.

"Thank you for all your support, I felt like I learned a lot. I just want to give something back to my community now."

Training participant

Helping Salford families feed their babies with confidence

The early weeks with a new baby can be overwhelming, and feeding is often where parents need support most. Our Salford Infant Feeding Peer Support Team offer hands-on, judgement-free help with infant feeding through home visits, community drop-in groups and phone support, so parents can make informed choices and keep going when things get hard.



OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

841

referrals received and contacted

594

parents engaged and supported with feeding

89%

still breastfeeding at 6–8 weeks

386

visits to our drop-in groups

66

families helped by our breast pump loan scheme

REACHING EVERY FAMILY

In February 2026 we became a universal service, so every new parent in Salford is now contacted and offered support. In just two months, that brought **413 new birth referrals**. Many families still find us themselves: 223 parents referred themselves this year, and 82 signed up at our groups. Health visitors and midwives also referred 123 families, showing how closely we work with Salford's health and maternity teams. The parents we support reflect Salford's diversity, with more than half from backgrounds other than White British.

WHAT FAMILIES TELL US

When we asked families about their support, **99%** said it had made a difference to them and **100%** would recommend us to another parent.

"I ended up combination feeding and by 3 months he wouldn't latch, so I pumped incessantly alongside formula. With my second son, Home-Start were kind, patient and supportive. My son is now almost 13 months old and has been entirely breastfed. At his lowest weight he was on the 2nd centile — he is now on the 90th."

Mum supported by our Infant Feeding team

When we asked families where they'd be without us, the same story came up again and again: breastfeeding ending before they wanted it to, lost confidence, and for some, anxiety, guilt or postnatal depression. With support, those families kept going, and many said it strengthened their bond with their baby at a fragile time.

LOOKING AHEAD

Almost two thirds of families (63%) said support would have helped even more had it reached them earlier. Becoming a universal service is a big step towards reaching every family early, and we'll keep building on it.

Volunteers



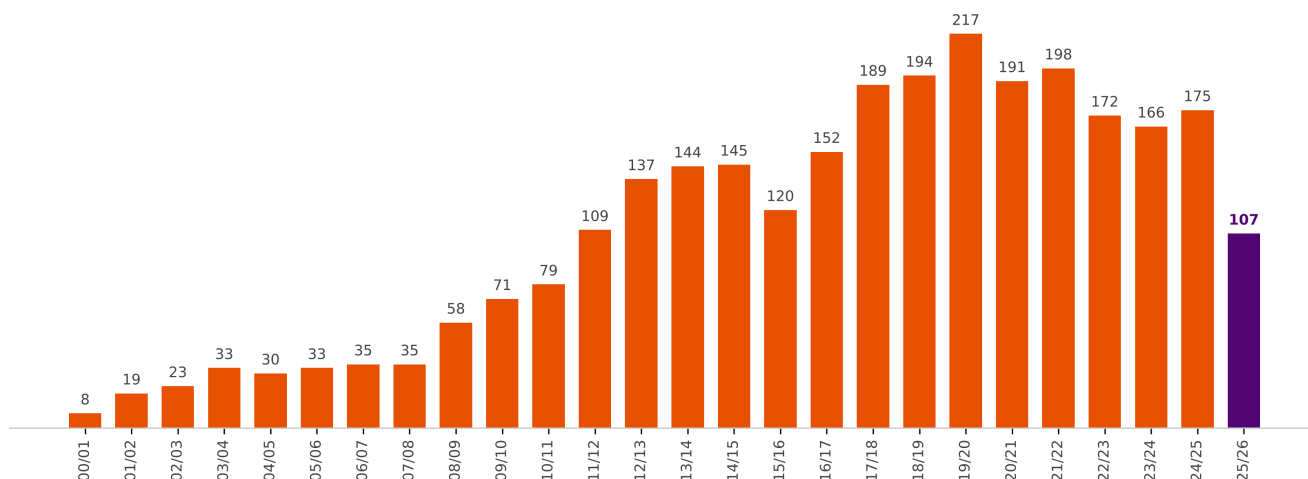
In 2025/26 we recruited and trained **49 new home-visiting volunteers**, who joined an army of **107 volunteers** available throughout the year. We also recruited and trained 7 new Infant Feeding Peer Supporter volunteers in partnership with NCT, helping more new parents in Salford get support with feeding their baby.

Becoming a Home-Start volunteer is a real commitment, and so is finding the right people. This year 171 people enquired about volunteering and 86 applied. Every volunteer is interviewed, safely recruited and trained before being matched with a family. Volunteers give their time for free, but recruiting, training and supervising them safely takes skilled staff and sustained investment.

As the chart shows, our volunteer numbers have fallen this year. People's lives are busier than ever, and many charities are finding it harder to recruit volunteers who can give time every week. Securing investment in volunteer recruitment and support is key to reaching more families.

Our volunteers come from all walks of life. Most of this year's new volunteers were aged 26 to 59, many with young children of their own, and between them our volunteers speak 16 languages. Word of mouth remains one of our best recruiters: many applicants heard about us from someone who already knew Home-Start.

Our home-visiting volunteers, 2000/01 to 2025/26



Volunteering with Home-Start benefits our volunteers as well as the families they support. This year:

96%

reported improved confidence

86%

reported increased life opportunities, such as training

72%

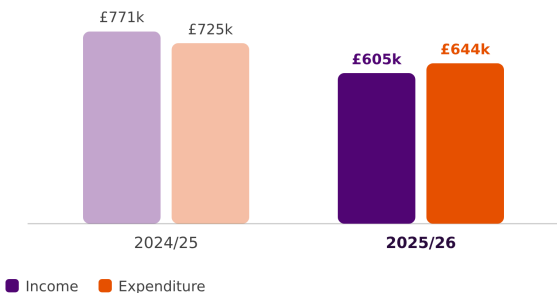
reported improved employment prospects

68%

of supported families would like to volunteer themselves

Treasurer's Report

Income and expenditure



The total income for the year to 31 March 2026 was £604,881, down from £771,242 in 2024/25. The reduction reflects both the increased competition for grants, and the additional funding received in 2024/25 in respect of the Salford City Council Infant Feeding Peer Support Project.

Total expenditure for the year was £643,577 (2024/25: £724,798), reflected in part by a reduction in staff numbers during parts of the year.

Overall, a net deficit of £38,696 was recorded for the financial year, against a net surplus of £46,444 in 2024/25. This swing is primarily down to timing, as expenses were incurred in the current year against income received in the previous financial year.

As in previous years, the majority of our expenditure – 78%, or £503,931 – was spent on staffing and associated costs, reflecting our continued commitment to paying all staff at least the Real Living Wage. Our average headcount reduced slightly to 18 during the year (2024/25: 20), in line with the funding available.

Donations and Gift Aid rose sharply to £37,349 (2024/25: £6,800), reflecting the generosity of individual supporters, while income from fundraising events reduced to £16,310 (2024/25: £48,245), primarily due to the loss of our Fundraising Manager.

We are, as always, enormously grateful to everyone who gave their time, money or support to fundraising activities during the year.

RESERVES POLICY AND GOING CONCERN

Total funds held at 31 March 2026 were £199,131, down from £237,827 the previous year. Of this, £45,163 is held in restricted funds, tied to specific projects and grants, and £153,968 in unrestricted funds – comprising £80,450 designated for potential future redundancy costs and £73,518 in our general fund, of which £71,662 are free reserves.

Our funds at 31 March 2026: £199,131



HSTSW places great importance on continuity of service to the families we support. If grant funding should cease, it is vital that funds are available either to secure alternative funding or to allow an orderly wind-down of the scheme. The Trustees consider it highly desirable to hold reserves sufficient to allow the charity to continue operating for at least six months if existing funding sources are not renewed. As the funding landscape becomes more challenging and short-term grant cycles continue to sit awkwardly with the long-term, whole-family support we provide, growing our unrestricted reserves – and securing more sustainable, multi-year funding – will remain an important focus for the Trustees in the coming year. The Trustees have reviewed the charity's finances and reserves and consider it appropriate to prepare these accounts on a going concern basis.

	2025/26 (£)	2024/25 (£)
Total income	604,881	771,242
Total expenditure	(643,577)	(724,798)
Net income / (expenditure)	(38,696)	46,444
Total funds carried forward	199,131	237,827
Restricted funds	45,163	138,488
Unrestricted funds	153,968	99,339

Sharon Feldmann
Treasurer

Thank you

We would like to sincerely thank all our funders and corporate supporters. Your generosity makes our work with families possible.



OUR FUNDERS



OUR CORPORATE SUPPORTERS



Thank you to every family who opened their door to us this year, and to everyone who helped us be there.

Get in touch

We'd love to hear from you

Call **0161 865 4222**

Email admin@hsts.org.uk · Visit www.hsts.org.uk