



## External Review of Maternity Project Home-Start in Suffolk | March 2023

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Steve Allman

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## About Home-Start in Suffolk

Home-Start in Suffolk is a volunteer-based family support charity working with children aged 0-12 across the county.

Home-Start's vision is that every child in Suffolk is given the best start in life and the charity fulfils this vision by supporting parents and carers to provide their child with support and guidance.

Support is primarily delivered by volunteers, who tend to have parenting experience themselves and must undergo extensive accredited training, with support from paid staff. The charity focusses on early intervention as it believes that's where children reap the most benefits and often works preventatively to reduce the likelihood of families requiring statutory support.

The charity provides a range of services including 1:1 support for families who need help to overcome isolation, mental health, disability, bereavement and a range of other challenges.

Traditionally, this support was offered in person but, since the pandemic, it has extended to include telephone and online support. Support also takes the form of family groups where parents and children attend groups in their local area and support to access a wide range of community facilities and liaise with statutory services, including social services, schools and health visitors.

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## About the Project

The Maternity Perinatal Care Coordinators Service (MPCCS) is funded by Ipswich & East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group and delivered by Home-Start in Suffolk.

The project was commissioned in February 2022 with the aim of bringing together elements of personalised care and social prescribing, enabling people to easily access support, talk about their challenges, receive advice on parenthood or be signposted to local support services.

It was envisaged that support would be accessed online, via phone or in person with parents being given a personalised care support plan and supported to become more independent.

The project began in February 2022 and was planned to run for one year simultaneously in Ipswich & East Suffolk, West Suffolk and North Essex.

Home-Start in Suffolk delivered the project in Ipswich & East Suffolk and West Suffolk and developed a partnership with Home-Start Colchester to deliver the service in North Essex\*.

The project aimed to help families under six core outcomes as follows:

- *More families supported to feed their babies, leading to lower emergency admissions.*
- *Improved wellbeing for all family members and reduction in isolation.*
- *Improved health for all family members.*
- *Influence on wider detriments of health.*

- *Improved access to services by hard-to-reach communities.*
- *Appropriate use of statutory services.*

In Suffolk, these outcomes are logged Home-Start in Suffolk's charity log database, from which quarterly reports are produced showing progress against outcomes.

*\* The data received by Home-Start in Suffolk about the North Essex element does not match the quality or quantity of its own data about the Ipswich & East Suffolk and West Suffolk elements. Therefore, this summary focusses predominantly on Ipswich & East Suffolk and West Suffolk.*

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## About Families Supported

- 85% of families supported in Ipswich & East Suffolk were considered vulnerable (61%) or extremely complex (24%), so it's a considerable achievement that the project has enabled a demonstrable improvement.

- 44% of parents in Ipswich & East Suffolk and 30% of parents in West Suffolk required a referral to a food bank or a food parcel due to their financial situation.

- 30% of parents in Ipswich & East Suffolk and 7% of parents in West Suffolk had experienced domestic abuse.

- 26% of families in Ipswich & East Suffolk and 18% of families in West Suffolk were in

the global majority, including 4% of families in Ipswich & East Suffolk who were Roma.

- 24% of children in Ipswich & East Suffolk and 16% of children in West Suffolk were subject to statutory processes, including Child in Need or Child Protection Plans.

- 18% of parents in both Suffolk districts were under 21 at the time of support.

- 15% of families in Ipswich & East Suffolk and 5% of families in West Suffolk were in temporary or tenuous housing.

- In North East Essex, the primary reasons for support included isolation, new babies or pregnancy, opportunities for babies to socialise and difficulties accessing local services.

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## Impact Highlights

- 65 families (247 people) were supported by the home-visiting service in Ipswich & East Suffolk, exceeding the project's target (20) by 225%.

- 35 families (143 people) were supported by the home-visiting service in West Suffolk, exceeding the project's target (20) by 75%.

- 58 families were referred to the service in North East Essex (via Home-Start Colchester, Jaywick and Clacton).
- In addition to families in North Essex, 100 families were supported via home-visiting across the two Suffolk districts, exceeding targets (40) by 150%.
- 19 families (44 people) were supported in group activities in Ipswich & East Suffolk.
- 37 families (81 people) in West Suffolk were supported in group activities, such as the Baby Beginnings group at the Family Hub in Haverhill.
- In addition to families in North Essex, 56 families (125 people) were supported in group activities across the two Suffolk districts.
- These groups, including Stay & Play, enable families to build community connections, receive advice support and guidance and access other services, such as the health visiting team or Citizens Advice services.
- At the Baby Beginnings group in Haverhill, young parents have enjoyed a virtual cooking group which meets online and enables them to develop healthy meals on a budget, share tips on weaning, hear from a Community Dietician and find out more about Healthy Start vouchers.
- Parents have also benefited from the knowledge and skills shared by staff, who have attended courses run by the midwifery team on Breast Feeding and Paediatric First Aid.
- At the Stay & Play group in Colchester, parents of babies under 1 benefited from peer support, information and advice, play time, donated goods and the opportunity to socialise.
- Parents in North East Essex value the opportunity for peer support, feeling less isolated, attending appointments and finding out about funding support, such as the Household Fund, which has enabled parents to buy fruit and vegetables and larger items, such as prams.
- Drop-ins, such as the one run in Colchester's Greenstead Community Centre, have provided parents with a place to access information, support and improve emotional wellbeing.
- The groups provide space for parents to socialise, which helps them feel less isolated, and also enables them to explore a range of issues including their child's sleep patterns, reflux, feeding, relationship issues, financial concerns, ideas for playing, etc.
- Financial hardship is a key issue for families attending the West Suffolk group, in particular, and Home-Start is helping in a

number of ways, including setting up a swap-shop for clothes.

- 78% of families in Ipswich & East Suffolk demonstrated improvement by moving an average of 1.2 points along Home-Start in Suffolk's outcomes framework, which scores their needs at the start and end of support.

- 68% of families in West Suffolk demonstrated improvement by moving an average of 1.5 points along the outcomes framework, which reflects the higher levels of need in that district.

- In West Suffolk, there was a notable difference in outcomes between families who attended the group having also attended the weighing clinic and those who didn't, with the latter starting from a lower base but showing the most improvement by the time support came to an end.

- Similarly, families West Suffolk presented with more complex needs and challenges, many of which were not fully resolved by the end of support, but were still recognised as an improvement.

- Home-Start in Suffolk has noted a significant increase in referral from Perinatal Mental Health teams, midwives and Health Visitors for expectant and new-born babies.

- The charity has become part of the holistic team working with pre-birth and new parents thanks to its involvement in the Personalised Care programme.

- Home-Start in Suffolk staff have accompanied midwives on home-visits to meet new parents and explore their needs and potential avenues of support, often matching them with a volunteer before their baby is born so they can begin to develop a supportive relationship.

- The project has enabled parents to be signposted towards other forms of support, including food banks, free baby essentials (eg: nappies) and potential sources of financial support.

- Volunteers have enabled parents to access health appointments and engage in local groups, including Family Hubs, weighing clinic and mental health workshops in local libraries.

- Home-Start in Suffolk has become part of the multi-disciplinary team working with a family where they are subject to a statutory plan.

- Every family supported by the project has an outcomes-based plan to enable them to become independent and develop strategies and coping skills to improve their family situation.

- The project has delivered £129,177 in social and local economic value, which represents an actual value of 239% - £2.39 for each £1 spent on the project.
- Compared with other Home-Start in Suffolk projects, the number of families in the global majority, experiencing domestic abuse or aged under 21 were higher than average.
- In West Suffolk, a high proportion of families were referred by the Family Nursing Partnership, enabling Home-Start in Suffolk to establish strong links with health colleagues.

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## Layla's Story

First-time mum Layla was just 20 when she fled an abusive relationship to live with her parents. Her ex-partner is deemed high risk so, until the courts have determined the extent of his involvement, Layla is being supported by Children's Services under a Child In Need Plan.

Layla was spending most of her time home alone as her family were working and she was isolated. She was unable to see friends as there were concerns about their contact with her ex-partner and she was anxious about attending groups as she was worried about being judged for how she looked or saying the wrong things.

Layla also dreamt of living independently one day, but recognised that she needed help to

grow her confidence and develop practical skills.

Layla's Health Visitor referred her to Home-Start in Suffolk and she joined the virtual cooking group, which helped her learn to cook but also provided a gentle way to meet new people. To start with, she would keep her microphone and camera off but, as the weeks passed by, she gradually began to contribute to conversation.

Home-Start in Suffolk matched Layla with Julie, a Family Support Worker, with whom she immediately began to build a trusting relationship. Layla agreed to get herself to the outskirts of town, where she would meet Julie and travel further into town together. Julie introduced her to the library, where she would regularly take out books to share with her baby.

Her confidence continued to grow and they began to attend Parent & Baby. Here, Layla spends time chatting to other parents and ensuring her baby can socialise and understands that Julie's support will gradually withdraw until she feels confident about attending on her own.

Julie has shared budgeting tools with Layla to help her prepare for when she needs to pay her own rent, bills and manage her finances. Layla's confidence has grown so much that she'll travel to town by herself to meet friends or walk with her baby.

She's working towards accessing the Parent & Baby group more regularly and planning her future with her new found budgeting and cooking skills, all with Julie's guidance, support and reassurance.

Layla recently joined the Freedom Programme, to help her process the abusive relationship she was in and to help her move on and give her baby the best possible opportunities in life.

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## Nadia's Story

During a routine antenatal appointment, Nadia shared that she was extremely anxious about her first pregnancy. Her and her partner didn't have a place of their own, she felt isolated and didn't have any friends, worried about housing and finances and worried about the birth itself.

Nadia's midwife was able to offer some reassurance by talking her through hospital procedures and her delivery plan, but the midwife said she did not have the capacity to spend more time with Nadia, which isn't part of her normal role, so she referred her to Home-Start in Suffolk.

Home-Start in Suffolk helped Nadia to access support from Citizens Advice, which helped her understand what support she might be eligible for. They also contacted the Welfare Rights team who were able to provide Nadia and her partner with further advice and support.

Nadia is Romanian and the only person in her family who speaks English, which was another source of stress during pregnancy as her family were reliant on her to help them access services. Home-Start in Suffolk provided a Family Coordinator who spoke Romanian and, during weekly visits and calls, Nadia could discuss her worries in more detail with someone who understood.

Home-Start in Suffolk offered practical support to Nadia to run through tasks she needed to complete before the baby arrived, questions she needed to ask her employer, things she needed to discuss with her midwife and listing items she needed at home and should take to hospital.

They helped Nadia feel less stressed about her financial situation by advising where she could find baby items for free or at a discounted price. Home-Start in Suffolk referred Nadia to the Baby Bank and Moses Basket Project, which provided a cot, pram, baby bath and bouncer.

Sadly, Nadia experienced a traumatic event at hospital and, when she is ready, Home-Start will support her to understand what happened and why certain interventions were necessary.

Nadia continues to have support from a volunteer who visits her home weekly and she says it's helpful to have someone to talk to about routines or how her baby's getting on. Nadia also used the Texting Service to access help when her baby wouldn't settle or breastfeed and Home-Start in Suffolk was able to offer advice and put her in touch with professionals.

With support from her volunteer, Nadia is also attending a Baby Beginnings group in Ipswich and hopes to attend baby massage classes in future, which she didn't feel confident about before. Nadia still struggles with isolation and looks forward to the group, and the visits from her volunteer, which she says has helped her feel more confident and improved her mental health.

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## What Professionals Say

As part of our review, we made a number of enquiries with local partners and professionals to hear their perceptions about the project's impact on local families and received a number of positive reviews as follows:

**"Home-Start in Suffolk is an invaluable service we are lucky to have access to across Suffolk.**

**As a perinatal nurse I meet hundreds of parents who benefit from their input from offering 1:1 volunteering, running groups and support in accessing local amenities and resources.**

**It is a place to go for increasing support networks, sharing relatable experiences which many of my clients report to love and value. The co-ordinators always work collaboratively with myself and my colleagues which I feel grateful to be able to access for our cliental."**

**GEORGIA OLDFIELD  
COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH NURSE  
SUFFOLK COMMUNITY PERINATAL SERVICE  
NORFOLK & SUFFOLK NHS FOUNDATION  
TRUST**

**"The work Home-Start in Suffolk does with our families has been very positive. The service has helped our mums gain confidence to access the community and feel more confident as mum.**

**The support Home-Start in Suffolk offers has been a positive intervention as part of their recovery plan and our perinatal service and our families value this very much.**

**My experience is positive and the families I have referred to Home-Start in Suffolk have spoken very positively about the support they have received. I think the service is amazing."**

**CLAIRE WILTSHIRE  
NORFOLK & SUFFOLK NHS FOUNDATION  
TRUST**

**"Home-Start in Suffolk is a brilliant service that I am finding myself referring families to a lot more. It provides the longer-term support that midwives and health visitors can't necessarily provide due to high demands.**

**It has helped families in their confidence in parenthood and has been great in helping with emotional wellbeing once we have discharged them.**

**Home-Start in Suffolk is an excellent service and offers a wide range of support to families, which improves outcomes."**

**MOLLY SPENCER  
CONTINUITY OF CARE MIDWIFE  
EAST SUFFOLK & NORTH ESSEX NHS  
FOUNDATION TRUST**

**"Home-Start in Suffolk has provided the young, vulnerable mothers I work with, with support and friendship from one-to-one home visits, mother and baby groups to online cooking classes.**

**There is very limited support for young mothers in West Suffolk. All of the support workers and volunteers from home start**

myself and my clients have met have been warm and friendly helping to build professional relationships with the hard-to-reach group of people I work with as a Family Nurse.

The support has included helping some clients gain confidence in leaving their home when anxious and isolated and building their confidence in their parenting when suffering with low mood.

In terms of improvements the only thing I can really suggest is continuing mum and baby groups. Home-Start has a group in Haverhill on a Tuesday morning which now has lots of local mothers attending but this has lost funding which is such a shame as I have had positive feedback from my clients who enjoy attending this group and feel comfortable, despite being young parents who often find it difficult to attend groups."

**SARAH INGLE, FAMILY NURSE, SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL**

"I am a Community Midwife, working with vulnerable women and families in Ipswich. I have referred many families to Home-Start in Suffolk in the last year. It is an invaluable service that supports me to support the women and families in my care. Home-Start in Suffolk has helped them to get to appointments, engage in parenting classes, prepare for their baby's arrival, address mental health issues and improve their home and living conditions.

Knowing that we have this excellent support available to the families in our care really does allow us to meet the increasing need

for care that is focused on the individual and allows us to improve the health and wellbeing of the women and children in our care. I have found the referral process very quick and easy to use. The communication from Home-Start in Suffolk throughout the process is excellent and it has become an integral partner in the delivery of our personalised care package."

**SUSAN WOOTTON, COMMUNITY MIDWIFE**

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## Challenges Faced by the Project

Home-Start in Suffolk had to overcome a number of challenges during the course of delivering this project. The charity has worked hard to overcome these, calling upon extra time and resources in addition to the initial plan. A brief summary follows:

- In Ipswich & East Suffolk, commissioners asked that the Stay & Play sessions were run from The Unity Centre, but this transpired to be an unsuitable venue and impacted attendance. It's on a very busy road in Ipswich some way from the town centre and there is limited parking. It was previously Whitton Clinic and has the appearance of an austere, local authority building.

Despite a comprehensive programme to raise awareness of the sessions, attendance remained low and the initial months were challenging. It was agreed to move the sessions to Castle Hill Community Centre, which was closer to town, on a bus route, had more parking and (as a converted house)

more of an informal feel, after which attendance began to slowly increase.

- Similarly, in West Suffolk it transpired that the original venue for the family group was unsuitable, so Home-Start relocated to another community venue and the group became much busier.

- Part-way through the project, commissioners introduced a Text Service, which meant Home-Start in Suffolk had to adapt its approach. However, this was not utilised as much as expected, which the charity believes could be down to lack of promotion or availability of other text services.

Our review has identified a couple of extra challenges as follows:

- Collating data about the whole project has been challenging as the two Home-Start schemes run different systems of varying quality, which means the full impact of the project is unclear.

- Our sense is that commissioners have taken a short-term approach and the project hasn't been given sufficient time to grow to full capacity. Home-Start in Suffolk has had to deal with a number of operational challenges which were created by commissioners, such as the challenges with the venue, and staff have had to spend considerable time resolving these issues when they could otherwise have remained focused on delivery.

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## Next Steps

At this stage, we normally identify next steps to improve and develop but, at the time of writing, Home-Start in Suffolk has received news that the funding will be discontinued, despite the charity rising to the challenges and exceeding the target number of families.

Our sense is that the project has found its feet after a challenging start and beginning to see the potential impact on local families when the project is working to capacity.

In addition to the direct impact delivered through the project, there are a number of developments which have emerged which are worthy of note for any future iterations:

- Home-Start in Suffolk has successfully increased support to partners of main carers through its support groups and informational sessions.

- The project has greatly improved links between Home-Start in Suffolk and the Perinatal Mental Health midwifery team, in addition to the midwifery teams in West Suffolk Hospital and Acorns in Ipswich, to the extent that staff have attended joint visits, multi-agency reviews, supported the development of birth plans, etc.

- Home-Start in Suffolk has been able to successfully adapt its approach to suit local needs and overcome challenges, such as identifying new venues and re-promoting the service to parents. The charity has also been

able to offer support to those on waiting lists, such as infant massage.

***It is our view that the project has achieved considerable impact in the lives of the families supported and we sincerely hope the lessons learned will enable Home-Start in Suffolk to continue effectively supporting local families in the future.***

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### About Home-Start Suffolk

This is just one of many initiatives by Home-Start in Suffolk to support families with young children. For more information, visit:

[www.homestartinsuffolk.org.uk](http://www.homestartinsuffolk.org.uk)

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### About Steve Allman

Steve Allman is a charity coach and consultant with particular knowledge of Home-Start having worked with a large number of schemes around the UK:

[www.steveallman.com](http://www.steveallman.com)