

Annual Report

2024-25



H&ME
START
Oxford





Contents

Supporting families across Oxfordshire...	Page 3
Our work in numbers.....	Page 5
Impact.....	Page 6
Our families.....	Page 7
Hearing from families - Stacey's story.....	Page 8
Growing Minds.....	Page 9
Groups and outreach.....	Page 10
Hearing from families - Anna's story.....	Page 11
Celebrating volunteers.....	Page 12
Partnership work.....	Page 13
Other highlights.....	Page 14
Finance	Page 18
Strategy update.....	Page 19
A thank you.....	Page 20

Supporting families across Oxfordshire: A look at the year

In the past year, Home-Start Oxford provided vital support to over **1,500** individuals—a record-breaking achievement that reflects both the growing need for our services and the dedication of our team and volunteers. We are proud to have reached more families than ever before, delivering compassionate, tailored support where it is most needed.

Our reach to lone parents has grown significantly. This year support needs related to **financial hardship, social isolation, and mental health challenges** were especially high. These issues are deeply interconnected, often compounding one another and placing immense strain on families. Over **77%** of the families we supported had multiple needs, highlighting the complexity of challenges for the families we serve.

Based on this experience, we have valued contributing to the **Marmot Place** initiative, a strategic endeavour to foster a fairer and healthier Oxfordshire. One of its key priorities—ensuring every child has the best possible start in life—resonates strongly with our work. Home-Start Oxford has long championed this goal, and we are proud to contribute to its advancement.

Our holistic approach continues to support parents facing a wide range of challenges, helping to alleviate pressure and restore space for connection and quality time with their children. The feedback we receive from families consistently affirms the value and effectiveness of our work.

We remain committed to evolving our services to meet emerging needs and to ensuring that every family we support feels heard, empowered, and hopeful for the future.

“We have fun here, and it’s nice for the kids to see that. I’m on my own so I don’t get adult conversation at all unless I come to groups like this. It’s got such a friendly atmosphere.”

A mum who attends our groups



Our work in numbers



740

children nurtured

541

families supported

249

group sessions took
place

62

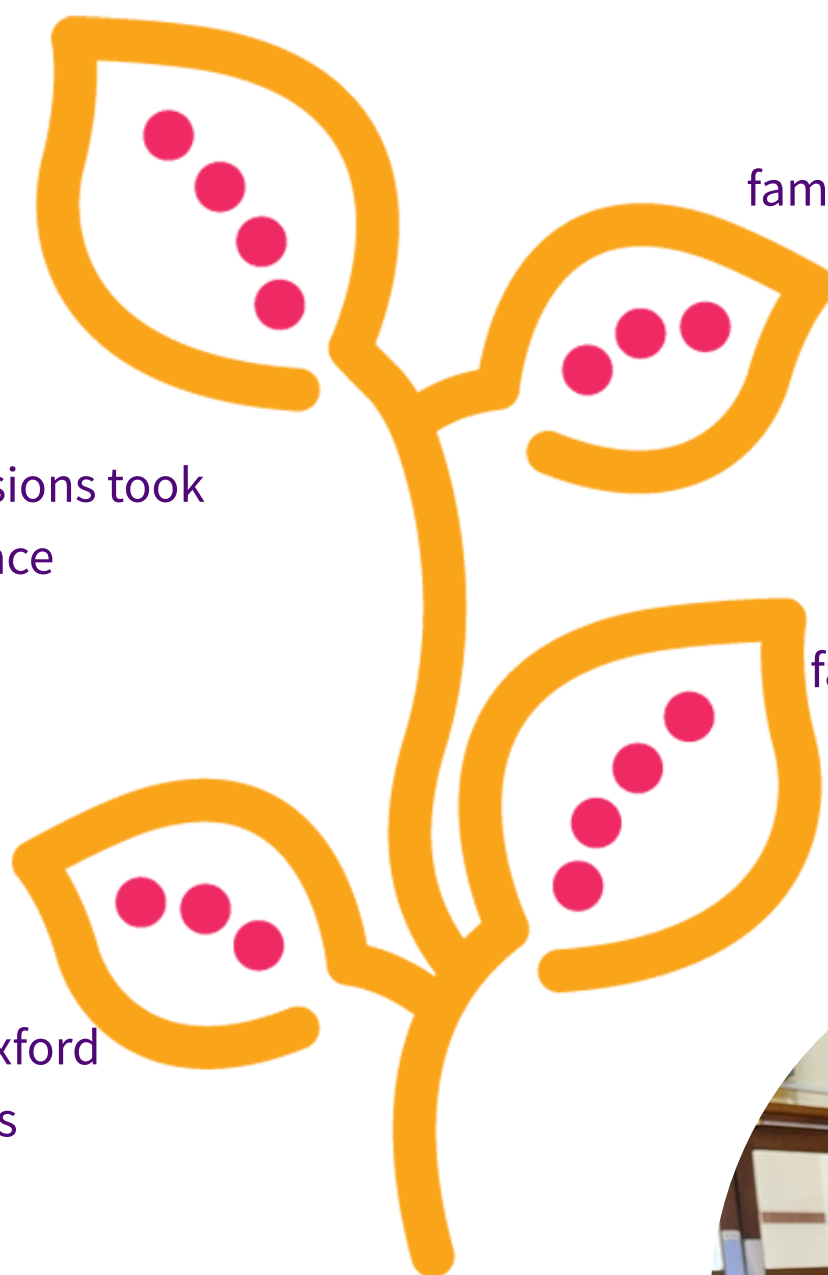
families received
home-visiting
support

59

Home-Start Oxford
volunteers

10k+

volunteer hours given



Impact



Last year, home-visited families reported significant improvements...

83%

saw improvements in their child's mental health

74%

saw improved parental self-esteem

79%

were better able to manage household finances

76%

felt less isolated

While at our groups, families told us...

89%

felt more confident to access the community & other services

94%

reported they had extended their support networks

100%

felt more confident supporting their child's learning & development

485

And...

485 families were supported through groups this year



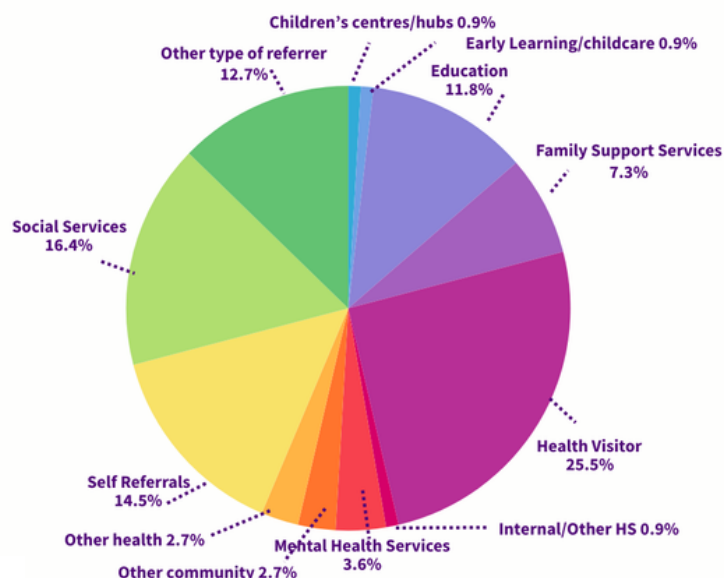
"Knowing my volunteer is coming once a week has really made a difference. To have her for 2 hours on a Monday – to go for a walk or coffee, I can really talk. Honestly it's appreciated, particularly when it's been a difficult week. Not having a connection with my family, knowing I'm seeing her has helped. It's a lifeline... me feeling less isolated is down to her."

A mum who had home-visiting support

Our families

Our families come to us in a number of ways, but we have seen this year that many of our home-visiting supported families are being referred to us by Health Visitors (25.5%) and social services (16.4%). Over 14% of families self referred themselves.

How families came to Home-Start 2024-25....



Of those that told us their ethnicity, families in 2024-25....



Families come to us from all backgrounds. We value the diversity of the families that we reach and the community of support that we help to create.

Overwhelmingly, emotional support was the number one form of support offered by our volunteers to families. However practical help with things such as budgeting and getting out and about and accessing services continues to grow.

Support our volunteers provided to families....



Hearing from the families:

Stacey's story



“The post-partum started straight after birth. I've had depression all my life anyway so I just thought I was having low moods. But when they explained well actually, you're not even willing to look at her, and not wanting to interact with your daughter, that's why they said it was post-partum.

As well as the post-partum I was very isolated, and very lonely. I live in a little village and all my family live 45 mins away, so I had no one nearby to support me. I just felt lonely. I can drive but I was too afraid to take my daughter in the car. I thought I was going to drop her and I just didn't want to leave the house because I was even too scared to go on the road. Where I live there's no pavements. So if I wanted to go for a walk with my daughter I'd have to take her in a pram, on the road, so I felt very scared to do that.

That's when my health visitor referred me to Home-Start. When we were at my house, sometimes Emma, my Home-Start volunteer, played with Millie, but sometimes she did things like teach me how to cook some simple meals. Other times Emma helped reassure me with everything, like my daughter rolling over. I was really worried at the time that she wasn't progressing properly, but Emma was like 'no, this is normal.'

Emma was very hands on and so helpful...I just felt relieved! I wasn't on my own doing everything. I feel like Home-Start not only helped me with tasks in the home, it was actually about being there, having conversations. You're never alone. You've got someone to talk to when times get rough.

Having Home-Start, it actually made me feel sane. I felt I was still human and having Emma really did make me feel better about myself. It also made me feel like I can do this, I can be a mum, I can be a normal person, I can enjoy life.

I've changed a lot since having Emma. I couldn't get out of the house, I couldn't go and do things for myself. Now I do go to a group and I do interact with mums in the class and I've made friends with the mums which is amazing. And yeah, all round I have a better relationship and stronger bond with Millie now too. I honestly think what Home-Start does is amazing, it really does change lives, it really has changed my life. ”



Growing Minds: Building brighter futures from birth



Now in its sixth year of a seven-year pilot, the **Growing Minds** project continues to thrive. Since its inception, **739 children** have been registered—bringing us within close reach of our target to support **800 families by 2027**. This milestone reflects the growing trust families place in our work and the tangible impact of our early years support.

Growing Minds is a pioneering initiative designed to support families from birth through to school, with a core mission to enhance school readiness and close the attainment gap from the very start. Operating in two areas of Oxfordshire, the project delivers a holistic suite of services through three main activities:

- **Dolly Parton's Imagination Library:** Every child receives a free high-quality book delivered to their home from birth to five, fostering early literacy and a love of story sharing.
- **Peep Groups:** Parents and young children attend group sessions to connect with other families, learn about child development, support nurturing relationships and home learning opportunities.
- **Home-Visiting Support:** Families receive home-based, tailored, weekly support with a range of challenges—from housing and poverty to mental health and emotional wellbeing.

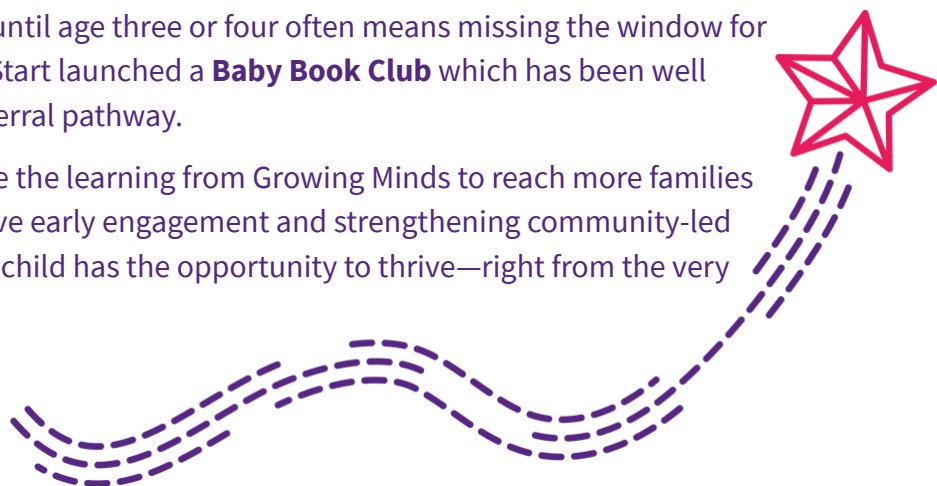


This collaborative effort is led by **Home-Start Oxford, Peeple, and The Berin Centre**, with additional support from community and statutory partners. Together, we are creating a support programme that meets families where they are and grows with them.

One of the most inspiring developments this year has been the evolution of community-led initiatives. For example, the Slow Cooker group, originally facilitated by Growing Minds staff, is now independently run by former participants. These parents, having gained confidence and skills through the programme, are now leading sessions and welcoming new families—an embodiment of empowerment and sustainability.

Regular **Learning Days** with our partners have enabled us to reflect and refine our approach. A key insight has been the importance of early engagement—ideally starting in pregnancy or the earliest days of a child's life. Waiting until age three or four often means missing the window for greatest impact. In response, Home-Start launched a **Baby Book Club** which has been well received and served as a valuable referral pathway.

Looking ahead, our mission is to scale the learning from Growing Minds to reach more families across Oxfordshire. Through pro-active early engagement and strengthening community-led support, we aim to ensure that every child has the opportunity to thrive—right from the very beginning.



Groups and outreach: Building community, confidence and connections

This year marked a significant expansion in our group-based support, with **sessions now running every day of the week**. Our group offerings now include a diverse range of sessions — from popular stay-and-play sessions to targeted initiatives such as **Baby Book Club** and **Daisies**, our Witney group for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Our regular groups have become embedded in their local communities, offering families an accessible and welcoming entry point to Home-Start support. We continue to see families move fluidly between our services—transitioning from home-visiting to group sessions as their needs evolve, or vice versa when additional support is required. This dynamic model reflects the trust families place in us and the safe, nurturing environments our groups provide.

With **school readiness** remaining a key concern across Oxfordshire—particularly as we progress toward becoming a Marmot Place—our group activities play a vital role in the early, most impactful years of their educational journey. Through play-based learning in groups, children develop essential skills such as socialisation, fine motor coordination, and self-confidence, laying the foundation for future success.

In response to the growth in the number of families attending groups and our commitment to enriching family experiences, we introduced a new role this year: our **Group Support Worker**, who joined the team in January. This addition has strengthened our capacity to deliver high-quality sessions and thanks to the dedication of all our staff and incredible volunteers, we delivered **249 group sessions** and **supported 485 families** through group-based activities this year.

Our summer programme also saw exciting developments, with weekly activities offered throughout the school holidays, including sessions such as the popular family disco, Fam Jam, and a visit from Little City, where children got to enjoy role playing. This year we also organised two day trips to Beale Park, which were met with overwhelmingly positive feedback.

We know **our groups are far more than ‘just’ toddler sessions**. They are spaces where parents build friendships, share concerns, connect with their children, and grow in confidence. They are places where children can thrive. And they remain one of the key focus points of our support to families in Oxfordshire.

“My daughter absolutely loves this group. As soon as we get into the room, she just leaves me! It feels like such a safe place, I know that she can go off and play and I can keep an eye on her but also chat with the other mums in the group who I’ve made friends with, which is really nice.”

Mum who attends group



Hearing from the families:

Anna's story



I've got a friend who goes to Puddle Jumpers and she asked me one day if I'd like to come along with my daughter. At the time I'd been living in my flat for four years. I absolutely loved it, it was my home, but when I was about 6 months pregnant with my daughter, the seal on the windows went and it just started to make everything in the flat mouldy.

It started off in the bedroom, when the windows started to go black. Then every two weeks I was having to deep clean to get all the mould off. But it just kept coming back, to the point where it wasn't just the windows, the internal wall in the flat had all gone mouldy, the living room had started to develop mould and then in the hallway, all above the door was mouldy too. This had been going on for ages, obviously I'd had my baby and she was now old enough to start to crawl by this point. I just remember feeling like I wasn't being listened to and I didn't know who else to go to for help.

At Puddle Jumpers, one of the mums said I should tell Jan because she might be able to help. So I did. I told her what was happening and then basically she took it on from there! She started contacting people for me and she'd send me updates about what she was doing and ask me at group how I was and what other things were going on and she was just super helpful.

I'd been really overwhelmed, especially because of my daughter. I remember when she was about 3 months old she'd ended up getting ill. She had a bit of a cough, and was generally feeling poorly, but then she got a temperature of 41 degrees, and in the end we went to hospital and she had to spend a few days there. I asked the doctor and they said the mould certainly wasn't helping my daughter when she was ill so that wasn't great.

The flat was a small one bedroom which only left a tiny bit of space between the cot and the walls. I moved the cot one day, and it was all mouldy right where her head was. It was hard, and we ended up moving her cot around a lot to try and get her away from the mould on the walls, but it was just always coming back.

I fully believe it was Jan that got us moved. We're now living in a 2 bedroom house and it's lovely and we're just so happy here. My daughter's got her own space, and it's so much better not to have to think about the mould.

I'm so incredibly grateful for Jan, she's definitely worth her weight in gold! I 100% think that I'd still be living in the flat if it wasn't for her help. I definitely think if I needed support or advice with anything else that I could ask at the group, and they'd be able to help me.



Celebrating our volunteers: The heart of Home-Start



This year we were privileged to have the support of **59 dedicated volunteers**, who all played a vital role in helping us deliver invaluable support to families. Our volunteers contribute in a variety of capacities—including **home-visiting, group support, and trustee leadership**—with many generously offering their time across multiple roles.

Together, our volunteers contributed over **10,000 hours** of their time this year to Home-Start. This extraordinary commitment is a testament to their belief in our work and their unwavering dedication to helping local families thrive.

Insights from our **annual volunteer survey** tell us that the core motivation behind their involvement is a desire to **make a meaningful difference** in the lives of others. The survey revealed that **92% of our home-visiting and group volunteers provided emotional support to families**, but alongside this, they are also offering practical assistance with things like budgeting, accessing services, and navigating everyday challenges—needs that have become increasingly important amid continued rising living costs.

As we move to 2025/26, volunteer recruitment will be crucial to meet our strategic goals. Our volunteers consistently go above and beyond, and we are deeply grateful for their contributions. We were especially moved by the reflections they shared about their experiences. One volunteer noted that the greatest satisfaction comes from hearing a parent say they've had a good day. Another shared that the most rewarding moment is when a family feels confident enough to move forward without support—truly demonstrating the empowering nature of our volunteer's role.

We are proud that **100% of surveyed volunteers** said they would recommend volunteering with Home-Start Oxford.

While words alone cannot fully express our gratitude, we extend our heartfelt thanks to every volunteer. Their time, compassion, and commitment are the foundation of our work — and the reason so many families feel supported, seen, and heard.



"My volunteer has been my rock. She is the Mum that I never had. Home-Start have been amazing."
A mum receiving home-visiting support

Partnership work: Strengthening support through collaboration



Partnership working remains a cornerstone of our approach at Home-Start Oxford, and this year we have seen the tangible benefits of these collaborations. These relationships have helped us to enhance our reach, deepen our impact, and ensure families receive the right support at the right time.

We are now one year into our **five-year strategic partnership with Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust**, and the positive impact and stability of having a multi-year funding relationship is already clear. Access to **Language Line** translation support now helps make the crucial first links with a family before matching with one of our bi-lingual volunteers. Sessions with Oxford Health staff informed the development of our new **SEND group, Daisies**, ensuring it is responsive to the needs of local families. **Volunteer recruitment** has been strengthened with opportunities promoted through Oxford Health's network and there's been valuable **training opportunities** for staff and volunteers, especially in perinatal and infant mental health.

We are delighted that our established link with **Active Oxfordshire** has now become a funded partnership. Home-Starts are a key delivery partner in the extension of the **YouMove** programme to children under 5, recognising the vital role of one-to-one support and groups to help families take the first steps out of the home and into community activity. We have enhanced the movement play within our sessions and enabled access to the wider YouMove offer.

We continue to collaborate with partners such as **The Story Museum** and **Pegasus Theatre**, who regularly deliver sessions within our groups. Meanwhile, funding from the **National Lottery Awards for All, Cash for Kids**, and support from **John Lewis** enabled us to offer two day trips to **Beale Park**—a first-time experience for many of the families who attended.

Our work within the **Home-Start Oxfordshire Consortium** continues to flourish. This partnership enables us to share best practice, pursue joint funding, and this year has seen us align our **data systems**—a significant achievement that now allows us to track trends and measure impact across the county.



Finally, our co-delivery of the **Oxfordshire Early Years Network**, our seat on the **Early Years Board** and innovation through **Growing Minds** have positioned us to advocate for family needs and the role of the voluntary sector at local, county and national levels. We have used our voice to champion the importance of early years support and ensure our community experience shapes policy and practice.

Through these partnerships, we aim to build a strong, connected support system for families—one that is collaborative, inclusive, and focused on long-term impact.

Other highlights



National Collaboration

Our CEO Katharine Barber was invited to meet with HRH Princess of Wales as part of a collaboration with the Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood. The project focused on increasing public understanding of the everyday actions adults can take to support young children's social and emotional development. The outcome is a series of seven beautifully animated films, each illustrating the science behind early brain development and showcasing how simple, caring interactions between adults and children can have a profound impact. See [The Explainer Series](#) to find out more.

Local Leadership

In January, Katharine shared our collective learning delivering the Growing Minds project, as a speaker at the first Oxfordshire Early Years Summit, convened by Oxfordshire's Inclusive Economy Partnership. We highlighted the importance of community-led services, rooted in evidence, alongside trusting relationships starting from birth, to address the entrenched disadvantage gap in Oxfordshire. We brought the voice and experience of families to the fore, building on our use of the Storytelling Methodology, which Katharine also shared as part of the Marmalade Festival with Arts at the Old Fire Station, an allied event of the Skoll World Forum.



Community Fundraising

We were so grateful to our team of 18 runners who took part in the Oxford Half Marathon for us this year. Their efforts raised over £4,500 for Home-Start Oxford, helping us to continue to deliver vital support to local families.



Other highlights



Reaching more families than ever this summer

Our summer campaign was our most ambitious yet, with an incredible programme of events held in Witney, Rose Hill and beyond! Thanks to additional funding we were able to provide free snacks and lunches at all events and for the first time, it included two day trips to Beale Park. In total, we welcomed over 588 attendees across the summer, reflecting our growing reach and the value of sustained support through the school holidays. One mum told us: *“I wouldn’t normally take the children out to a place like this because, well one, it’s expensive but secondly because I don’t drive so it’s much harder to get to anywhere, so this has been really nice. I love that you do things like this. It’s things that we’ve never experienced before.”*



Oxfordshire Play Association (OPA) Days

In addition to our own summer activities, we participated in four Oxfordshire Play Association Play Days. Supported by our incredible volunteers and staff, these events provided a valuable opportunity to engage with the wider community and offer free, fun activities for young families.

Welcoming new team members

This year, we welcomed five new staff members to our team, each bringing a rich breadth of experience that we are excited to build on. We said farewell to four long-standing staff members, who we thank for all that they brought to their work, especially through the aftermath of the covid pandemic.



Other highlights



Family Christmas parties

This year we were delighted to be able to hold two Christmas parties, in Witney and Rose Hill, to which all our families were invited. The parties included lots of activities, dancing and games, alongside a party lunch and each child left with a gift. It was a delight to see all the children enjoy themselves and we can't wait to do it again next year!

Big Give success

This year we once again participated in the Big Give Christmas Challenge, the UK's largest match-funding campaign, whereby every donation given is doubled by funders. We set ourselves the ambitious target of raising £35,000 and were thrilled to surpass it - raising over £45,000!! These funds will directly support our work with families and is all thanks to the generosity of our supporters.



Volunteer meet ups

This year we've enjoyed a number of volunteer events including Wellness Walks and a Christmas coffee morning. These have sat alongside numerous enhanced training opportunities such as First Aid and Perinatal Infant Mental Health. It's been so lovely to catch up with everyone at these events.



Other highlights

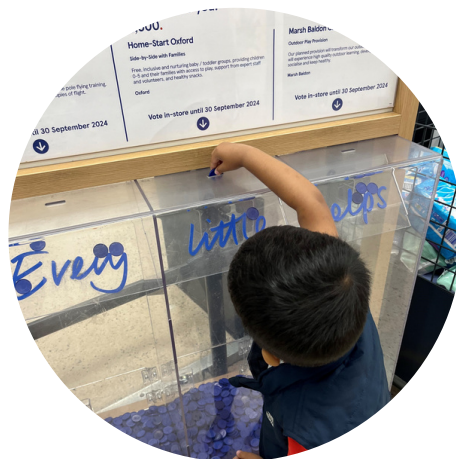


Volunteer training and recruitment

Volunteer recruitment remains a priority, and this year we delivered both a home-visiting preparation course and a group volunteer preparation course. In 2025/26 we aim to run four preparation courses a year to help grow and strengthen our volunteer community.

Tesco Stronger Starts

This year Home-Start Oxford was selected to be part of Tesco's 'Stronger Starts' token campaign where shoppers could vote for Home-Start with their blue tokens. We were blown away with support and were delighted when we were told that we had been awarded £3,000 as a result.



Finance Report

This year total income increased by a remarkable 42% to £415,423 in 2024-25 (£315,106 2023-24). A number of factors contributed to this. Firstly there was an increase of almost £70,000 from statutory bodies, including, for the first time Oxford Health. We have also seen a successful restart of funding from the National Lottery (£25,000), and increased funding from long-term supporters including BBC Children in Need and The Henry Smith Foundation.

Unrestricted income, which we are free to use flexibly, was unchanged at £123,000, while restricted income increased by £124,000 to £293,000 from £169,000.

That we managed a very material increase in our income in the current, difficult, environment with increased competition for funds, was in no small part due to the efforts and expertise of our Development team, who have been responsible for the sourcing of funds and reporting back to grant-givers, as well as to the increased involvement of our CEO in a number of important networks.

As part of the Home-Start Oxfordshire Consortium, alongside Home-Start Banbury, Bicester and Chipping Norton and Home-Start Southern Oxfordshire, we have also been able to successfully apply for funding for projects covering the entire county; a strategy we are keen to build on going forward.

Our work would not be possible without the generosity of our diverse group of funders. Large and small, their support has sustained our service and helped it to grow. At a time when many charities are struggling, their generosity and recognition of the importance of investing in the Early Years means we have supported more families than ever before this year. We also very much appreciate the proactive approach to grant-making that many donors are now taking. From consultations around application processes, to being responsive to families' changing needs, getting involved and attending our events. We are heartened by their kindness, collaboration and support.

Home-Start Oxford financial summary 2024-25

INCOME	
Statutory grant funding (restricted)	97,479
Other restricted grants and donations	195,286
Home-Start UK	8,604
Other income & donations	114,054
Total	415,423
EXPENDITURE	
Staff costs	311,115
Volunteer costs	3,994
Family outings, events and direct support	9,543
Rent & insurance	8,295
Fees (incl Home-Start UK)	6,447
IT costs	10,126
General office costs	9,371
Fundraising	4,013
Total	362,904
Surplus / (deficit)	52,520
Net Assets	282,830



Strategy Update



Home-Start's vision is to shape a country where all children have the best possible start in life.

We want to make sure that no parent or family feels alone in the critical task of raising children.

Across Oxford, West and Central Oxfordshire, our focus is on building compassionate communities of support for families, parents and children – because childhood can't wait.

Our strategy for 2024 – 2027 is focused on:

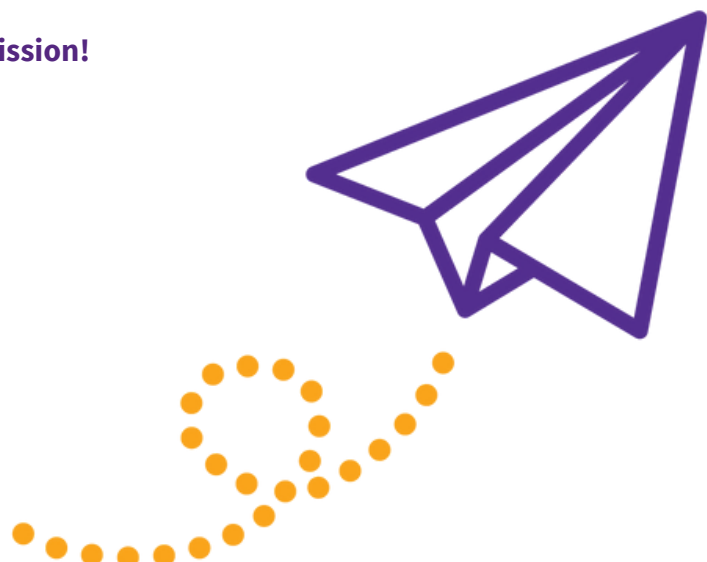
- Deepening our **Impact** – empowering families, our volunteer and staff teams, to have the confidence and skills to make a lasting difference to children's lives.
- Achieving **Growth** – so more parents with young children, in our area, can access support, with a particular focus on home-visiting where demand is especially pressing.
- Advance **Inclusion** – by focusing on families facing the greatest inequalities, and celebrating the diversity of our community, in all that we do.
- Amplify the **Voice** – of local families and partners to inform our service and make the case for preventative support in the earliest years.
- Greater **Financial security** – to sustain our service and fulfil our plans.

Looking forwards, we are:

- Aiming to consolidate and continue our **Growing Minds** school readiness project, and prepare for expansion to a new area.
- Seeking to significantly expand our **volunteer recruitment** and training.
- Planning and fundraising for the introduction of **Dad Matters**, to provide dedicated outreach and support to new dads.

We will be there for parents when they need us most – because childhood can't wait.

We would love you to join us in our mission!



A thank you



Heartfelt thanks to the many individuals, donors, trusts, foundations, churches, councils, Oxford colleges, businesses, and partner organisations who have supported us during the year.

These include but are not limited to....



Home-Start Oxford, 26 Kingfisher Green, Oxford, OX4 7BX
T: 01865 649 003
E: admin@homestartoxford.org.uk

Charity No. 1108612
Company No. 5375011