

Volunteering with Home-Start Bradford District

We ask that volunteers give **three to four hours a week** for a minimum commitment of **one year**.

Volunteers who successfully complete the application process (below) will be matched with a family to support. We expect volunteers to visit their family usually once a week for a couple of hours each time. Some volunteers visit more often, if they are able and the family requests this, and some visit more than one family.

Volunteers visit the same family each week and build up a positive, supportive relationship. They offer a befriending service and emotional support, with some practical assistance – but this does not mean that our volunteers are free babysitters, home helps or a taxi service. The type and depth of support offered to a family will depend on the needs they have expressed to the Family & Volunteer Coordinator. Great care is taken when matching volunteers and families, considering the volunteer's skills, ability and confidence.

Most volunteers visit in daytime, but some work full-time or have other commitments and visit in the evening or at weekends – this is a time when some people feel most isolated and some families do request this.

The families we visit are all unique and have quite different needs, but all need some support. Some are lone parents, some have partners who work away, some are new to the country or just to the area and will need to be shown around, introduced to other networks such as a parent and toddler group and above all need a friend with a listening ear. Some parents are suffering from post-natal depression or there is illness or disability in the family. There are as many reasons for needing some extra support as there are families!

All out-of-pocket expenses for our volunteers are reimbursed: volunteers can claim for bus fares, mileage, any outings you take the family on, phone calls and a few other things if agreed in advance.

We support families living across the Bradford District. Family & Volunteer Coordinators will bear in mind the areas volunteers and families live in when matching, so that transport is manageable, but we don't like to match people who live too close as this can impinge on families' confidentiality.

The volunteer process

Becoming a Home-Start Bradford District volunteer can be quite a long process, but this helps us to get to know each other well and hopefully make a good match with a family. This is exciting and rewarding voluntary work which requires commitment, reliability, and a sense of humour!

Application

We welcome interest from all sections of the community, and the first step to becoming a Home-Start Bradford District volunteer is to complete the application form. Don't worry too much about the form – complete as much of it as you can, return it to the office and any missing gaps can be filled in when you meet with the Family & Volunteer Coordinator.

Don't worry either at this stage if you have to disclose information about your past such as a criminal conviction. We need you to be honest in your application. Issues in your past do not necessarily mean that you cannot be a volunteer – we will discuss the circumstances surrounding any incident and maybe seek further information before making a decision. We wouldn't turn away a potentially good volunteer for a speeding fine they got ten years ago! However, we are unlikely to accept someone who has convictions for violence, arson or any other Schedule 1 offences. You can always phone to discuss it if you are not sure.

We take safeguarding children seriously at Home-Start. Since the work that we do is with children and vulnerable people, it is important that we do our utmost not only to protect children and vulnerable adults, but also ourselves. This is why the recruitment and selection process is so rigorous.

First interview

Once your application has been reviewed, successful applicants will be invited to an informal initial interview with a Family & Volunteer Coordinator. This is again nothing to be worried about – it's a relaxed conversation, a chance for you to ask questions and for us to assess your skills, experience and suitability for the volunteering role. It will usually take place at one of our two offices (BD3 and BD21), and following the interview successful candidates will be offered a place on the course of preparation.

You may also be invited to an open day, where you can come and meet other volunteers who will be attending the course, and make a start on completing the paperwork and checks required to become a Home-Start Bradford District volunteer. The open day is not compulsory, but it is a good opportunity to meet others and to ensure that there is no delay in getting you matched with a family later in the process.

References and checks

At this point we will seek two references from the referees identified on your application form, and apply for an enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) disclosure. Your referees cannot be related to or living with you, but it is ok to use someone who you have known as a friend for at least two years.

Course of preparation

The course of preparation helps to prepare you to visit a family. It is quite a long course (40-50 hours, either one 4-5 hour session each week for 10 weeks, or sometimes two 4-5 hour sessions each week for 5 weeks). Most people find it enjoyable though, and a good way to meet other people. Sessions are usually held during school hours, and break for school holidays, although we sometimes run evening courses if there's demand. Light refreshments are provided, but you'll need to provide your own lunch – there is usually a café on site.

There is very little writing that has to be done during the course and we'll provide all materials you need. There will be quite a bit of reading to be done for some of the activities and learning, and to keep things moving we'll ask you to do some reading and preparation between some of the sessions. It's up to you how much you want to write and how much you want to say in group discussions, but as the group (usually 10-15 people) get to know each other we have difficulties in keeping people quiet! If you have concerns or need extra support with reading or writing, please speak to your Family & Volunteer Coordinator.

The course will be held at our main offices (The Thornbury Centre, BD3), or sometimes in another community venue around Bradford. We always use centres with facilities for users with disabilities. We are sometimes able to pay childcare costs (funding-dependent), but only to registered childcare providers.

You must complete all of the sessions of the course before being matched with a family. If you do miss a session or two, you will need to attend the catch up session at the end of the course. If you miss more than two sessions then unfortunately you will not be able to continue and you will have to restart, joining the next course of preparation we run. We strongly encourage you to attend all of the sessions, so that your time is not wasted.

Second interview

Towards the end of the course of preparation, trainee volunteers will have a second informal interview, this time in their own home, where you'll discuss how the course is going for you and what you feel you are most and least confident in doing. It's fine to say at this point if there are certain things you do not want in a family – some people are uncomfortable with cats, dogs or small babies for example. This information will help your Coordinator to make a successful match with a family.

Neither the course of preparation or the interviews are 'pass or fail' processes, they are to properly equip you for supporting a family and to ensure that we match you with the most appropriate family. If concerns

do arise, either from you about volunteering or from us around your suitability as a volunteer, the second interview is a place to discuss these and see if they can be resolved.

Matching and visiting

Once you have completed the course of preparation and your paperwork and checks are complete, you will be matched with a family to support, visiting them weekly if possible. You will complete diary sheets each time you visit the family, recording details of the visit (training will be given during the course of preparation).

After the match visit, where you are introduced to the family, your Family & Volunteer Coordinator will contact both you and the family to see how things went. Great care is taken in the matching, but sometimes things do not work out as expected. When this happens, your Coordinator will discuss the best way forward.

Once matched, you will have one-to-one supervision meetings with your Family & Volunteer Coordinator every six weeks. At these meetings you will discuss and hand in your diary sheets since the last supervision meeting, and submit expense claims for your travel and other expenses for that period.

There will also be regular VOTS (Volunteer Ongoing Training and Support) meetings. Some of these will be compulsory (primarily an annual safeguarding and diary sheet update session), others will be to develop you as a volunteer and give you tools and knowledge which can help you in supporting families. They also give an opportunity to meet with other volunteers, to share advice and tips and to provide mutual support. We also organise occasional social events.

Ending and resting

Your support of a family is intended to be time-limited, and part of your supervision with your Family & Volunteer Coordinator will be to identify steps to enabling the family to no longer require your support. Once your support for a family ends, your Coordinator will review the support with you and then look to match you with another family. Whilst this process may not be immediate, we do aim to get you matched as soon as possible and out supporting another family.

We do allow volunteers to take a formal 'rest' between supporting families, for up to three months. During this period your Family & Volunteer Coordinator will maintain informal contact every four weeks. Following a rest period, you will have a supervision session with your Coordinator before being matched with a family, plus if the rest was for more than six weeks, a catch up session on any new or updated policies.

Longer rests of up to six months will be allowed in exceptional circumstances, following which you will also need to attend a refresher preparation session. Volunteers resting for more than six months will have to complete a full course of preparation and application checks again.

More information

We hope this answers some of your questions, if you have any others then please do speak to a Family & Volunteer Coordinator when you see one, or contact the office.