

ANNUAL REPORT

April 2021-March 2022



'Thank you, Ann'

Kind-hearted volunteer steps down after 27 years of providing support to families

BY VICTORIA HOUSDEN
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A PASSIONATE belief that parents need support to be the best they can be has always been at the heart of Ann Devlin's volunteer work with 'Home-Start Omagh' – and after 27 successful years, filled with care, empathy and love for families across the town, the Gortin woman is now preparing to retire from her role.

It was in 1994 that Ann stepped forward as a volunteer with the UK charity; a time when it was just starting up in the Omagh area, and in need of people with great 'listening skills' to come on board.

And it was a match made in heaven: The charity, which had visions of tailoring home visiting support to families within the Omagh district area, melded perfectly with Ann's kind-hearted nature and positive nature, and gentle approach.

Recounting, with fondness, the beginning of her long-lasting volunteer journey, Ms Devlin said that it was the charity's requirement for 'listening skills' that first caught her attention.

"I had some free time; my two children were at school, and I saw the advert in the paper," Ann said. "I understood the need for someone with listening skills, and I wanted to help mums, and new mums, without support around them."

"It was something I could do. "I thought that I could share my experiences, and encourage another mum to give something a try, as it could help them."

'NON-JUDGEMENTAL SUPPORT'

The training that Home-Start provided focused on the non-judgemental support and commitment that a home-visiting volunteer could offer a family with young children.

After the training, Ann was



Ann Devlin has volunteered with Home-Start Omagh for 27 years.

matched with her first family, and it did not take long for the local lady to become an extremely popular volunteer.

During her time with Home-Start, Ms Devlin has guided families through some of their most challenging times, including poor mental health; physical ill health; bereavement; miscarriage; and family breakdown.

Ann has also helped families with new-born babies, through to children starting school and everything in between.

There were some families that she

supported for months, while others, for more than a year – and she has also attended the weddings and birthdays of many of these families along the way!

A role filled with variety, emotions and understanding, Ann respected that some mums and dads that she was working with had lost confidence, were not ready to connect, or were just so fearful that it stopped them from socialising.

Supporting them through their isolation, Ann offered open arms of encouragement as they found their feet and re-connected with their family, friends, and communities.

'ENJOYING A CUPPA TOGETHER'

Working around Ann's family commitments as they changed over the course of 27 years, Ms Devlin said that she greatly appreciated the support of Home-Start Omagh during her time as a volunteer.

With someone always there to talk to in the office should she be really worried about a family she was seeing, Ann also enjoyed the social events with the other volunteers and the additional training she received.

"I'm there for families, and it has seemed to work," Ann reflected.

"Home-Start took me out of my own bubble, too, and the families I have supported have shaped me into the person I have become."

"Some days I was just hanging in there, like they were, and over a cup of tea and some breathing together, we made it through that day."

"Life can be difficult, and I would say to anyone needing help, that it is a strength to ask for help; you are not failing, step forward, and take the help as you will feel so much better."

"There is light at the end of the par-

enting tunnel."

Working with Ann for more than ten years, Allison Spriggs, Home-Start Omagh district co-ordinator, described the Gortin volunteer as 'a huge part of the healing' for so many of the charity's supported parents.

'POWERFUL HEALING'

"Ann's approach as a listening ear is so powerful and yet so simple," Allison said.

"She has been a constant: Supporting mums going through all kinds of difficulties; providing them with outstanding care and support; and a source of local knowledge and experience."

"We have loved having her on our team for so long."

"She will be hugely missed."

Ann used the restrictions of the recent pandemic period to gradually step down from home-visiting family support, and has no plans yet for the gap retiring from Home-Start Omagh District creates in her life.

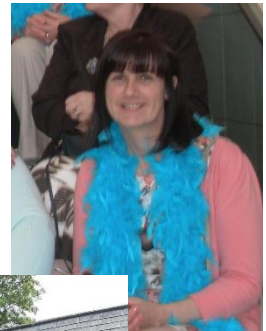
However, she will forever be thankful for the experiences she has shared with families, and the support Home-Start gave her as a volunteer.

Concluding, Ann said that she hopes that the charity continues to secure its funding to support more families, as she feels that the need for support has increased in the last few years.

Home-Start Omagh will be hosting a thank you event for Ann in the next few months to acknowledge and celebrate her wonderful contributions.

● If you'd like to volunteer to support local families or know more about the charity, please email coordinator, Allison Spriggs, on 'coordinator@homestart-omaghdistrict.org.uk' or call 078 43749853.

Home-Start Omagh District thanks Ann Devlin for her 27 years as a home-visiting volunteer



And we thank Lily, Ann and Joanna for their time and commitment to our trustee board



About Home-Start Omagh District

Home-Start Omagh District is a volunteer-based family support charity working with families, with at least one child under the age of 5, across the Omagh District area.

We provide home-visiting volunteer support to families, through a team of trained volunteers. Our focus is on the early years because that is where children reap the biggest benefit from parents who are healthy and happy. A better start in life can change a child's future.

We work alongside parents to ensure that the stable foundations children need to thrive as adults are there. Our non-judgmental, compassionate, and confidential help and support is as individual as the families we work with. By providing that lighter touch, and non-statutory service, we aim to get families to a place where they are able to use services in their local community.



Our Mission: To empower parents with the skills, knowledge, and emotional resilience to enable their children to flourish

Our Vision: A society in which every parent / carer has the support they need to give their children the best possible start in life

**Our Values: Available to all
Non-judgmental
Preventative**

Home-Start Omagh Trustees

2021-2022



Our Trustees give extensive time, sharing their knowledge and experience, to direct and oversee the work of the scheme.

Chairperson – Carol Moore

Vice chairperson – Emma Owens

Treasurer – Eithne Connolly

Trustee – Dr. Maureen Halliday

Susan McDermott (December 2021)

Trustee – Anne Lowry (retired)

Trustee – Lily O'Donnell (retired)

Trustee- Joanna Jarosz (retired)

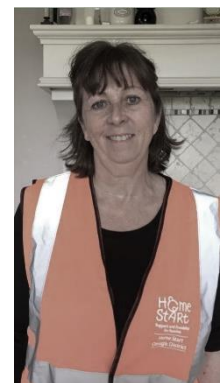


Staff



Allison Spriggs
Coordinator

Bernie Doody
Administrator



Chairperson's Report



This is the Chairperson's Report for the year 2021/2022 for Home Start Omagh District.

During the period covered by this report (April 2021 – March 2022) we continued to be affected by Covid 19 in certain aspects of the day to day running of the scheme. Trustee meetings were held completely, or partially, via Zoom, but we were glad to be able to conduct business in any shape or form given the circumstances. Staff had to work from home and volunteers had to find alternative ways to contact families. Staff, volunteers, families, and trustees succumbed to the virus impacting on the service we could provide.

In April 2021 volunteer contact with families was in the form of doorstep visits, walks with families and telephone contact. The distribution of support parcels continued over the summer period of 2021. At Christmas time BT provided gift boxes for thirty-five families past and present. We are indebted to BT at Enniskillen for their generosity. Eventually restrictions eased and more normal visits and support took place for families in need in our area.

Allison and Bernie continued to provide detailed monthly and quarterly reports of all the types of support for all families to the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

The Omagh Multiples Group commenced in February 2022, and I am indebted to Allison and Linda for getting this organized. By all accounts it was a remarkable success.

With an ever-increasing workload, Allison is still endeavoring to find a way to split the role of Coordinator and family support worker for the scheme. Having another member of staff to provide support for our volunteers and families would be the ideal situation, leaving the Coordinator free to carry out the day to day running of the scheme. This will be the challenge for the current staff and Trustees going forward. As always funding is the biggest issue in achieving this goal.

During the year Lily O'Donnell, trustee, decided to resign due to family commitments which I fully appreciate. I wish her well and will miss her presence around the table. Ann Lowry and Joanne Jarosz remain trustees in an advisory capacity. We welcomed Susan McDermott as a new trustee and hope to see her again in the near future.

Also, during the year long term volunteer AD decided to retire from volunteering for Home Start after over 27 years of service. Her contribution to the scheme and the community is enormous. I shall miss her dedication and wish her well for the future.



Our administrator and volunteer, Bernie decided to leave in March 2022. I wish her well in whatever she chooses to do in the future; and thank her for all the work she did in the office, and in providing support to families in need.

We are indebted to all the funders who contributed, and their details can be found in the treasurer's report and the Annual Financial Report. I would like to thank the Western and Social Care Trust for their continued funding for the scheme.

I would like to thank Allison and Bernie, staff members for their continued dedication to Home Start Omagh District. This was not an easy year for charities, particularly one which provides a home visiting service.

I would like to thank all the volunteers past and present for their time and talents in providing help to families in need, often in ways outside the usual manner in which a Home Start volunteer does. I hope that now, and in the years that lie ahead, we can continue to support families who require our assistance to give children a better start in life.

My thanks are due to the trustees of Home Start who attend our meetings regularly and give their time and talents to discuss how best we can support staff and volunteers of the scheme. This concludes my chairperson's report.



Carol Moore
Chairperson



Treasurer's Report

Welcome everyone to Home-Start Annual General Meeting 2021-2022. Another very busy year has passed, during which much has been accomplished. I now wish to acknowledge the many people who have supported and helped Home-Start Omagh over the last financial year.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Western Health and Social Care Trust, who in recognition of our sterling work within the Omagh area, are the main source of Home Start Omagh's funding. I would also like to thank:

- Martin Lewis Emergency Fund
- Garfield Weston
- AIVC Small Grants
- Omagh Forum for Rural Associations
- Arnold Clarke
- Fermanagh & Omagh District Council
- John Moores Foundation
- Covid-19 Charities Fund
- Awards For All
- Belfast Cathedral Sitout
- Home-Start UK's Connecting Families at Christmas Fund
- Neighbourly Fund
- Home-Start UK's Recovery & Resilience Fund through The Pears Foundation
- Home-Start UK and the Brooke Trust
- HSUK Caring for Families during COVID Fund

for providing us with grants and donations that allowed us to meet our funding needs to provide necessary requirements for families and training for our volunteers, during the 2021-2022 financial year.

I would like to thank our amazing Home-visiting Volunteers who are the mainstay of our inspiring organisation, Home-Start Omagh District. Not only are you kind and dedicated, but you bring a wealth of experience and talents to share with families.

I also owe particular thanks to my fellow Trustees for all their support over the last year. Being part of a team who bring different skill sets and different perspectives, which, I believe, is a great learning experience for everyone.

I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge all the exceptional work that Allison, our Coordinator, accomplishes on a day-to-day basis ensuring the smooth running of Home-Start Omagh. I also wish to acknowledge the valued contribution which Bernie, our Administrator, made to Home-Start Omagh District, until her resignation. I warmly welcome Leanne, who was appointed to the post of Administrator, and I hope she will be happy in her new role.

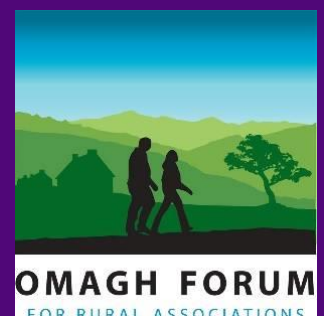
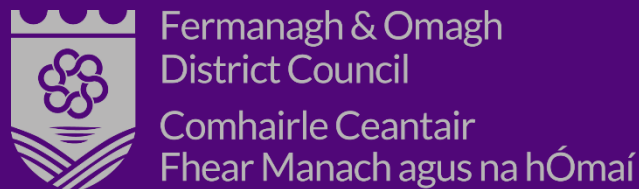
Finally, there may be challenging times ahead for families because of the current financial climate. I do hope with continued support from Funders, Home-Start Omagh District will be able to continue to provide the very valuable, and much needed assistance, to families at a particular time in their lives.



Eithne Connolly, Treasurer

OUR FUNDERS

2021-2022





Coordinator's Report and events

2021-2022

About this time every year I sit and think about what has happened within Home-Start Omagh District that I need to share in my report, and every year I am overwhelmed with gratitude for our incredible home-visiting volunteers and trustees who take the time to support parents and children in the Omagh District area. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your commitment and time over the last year.



The pandemic has been a dominant force in everyone's lives since March 2020, and like everyone else, Home-Start Omagh District has had to adapt to a new normal. Ongoing COVID restrictions and rising infection numbers meant that the garden gate visits, phone and Zoom calls and outdoor walks offered by volunteers were a lifeline for families until normal face-to-face visits were allowed to resume.

Thanks to the many small grants we were fortunate enough to receive, Home-Start Omagh District has been able to support families in new and different ways in 2021-2022:

- In April 2021, Five Lenovo tablets delivered to Home-Start Omagh families through the Omagh Forum for Rural Association's Connectivity Project;
- In May 2021, 19 Dental hygiene packs for children thanks to donations from Bupa Dental Care on the Derry Road, Omagh;
- June 2021, Two Zoom workshops run by Speech and Language Therapist, Lisa McGillion, and attended by Home-Start families from Omagh and from other Home-Start areas in Northern Ireland;
- In June 2021, 19 bundles of toiletries and goodies were delivered to 19 Home-Start dads, to celebrate Father's Day, thanks to the Omagh Hygiene Bank;





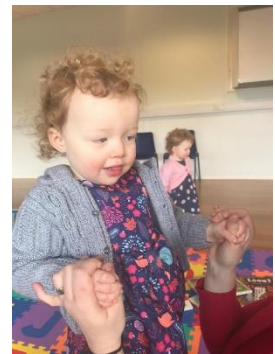
- In December 2021, Christmas gifts to 45 Home-Start families (a total of 125 children) thanks to a very generous donation of toys, books and clothes from BT in Enniskillen. We are incredibly thankful as BT staff braved Storm Barra to deliver them to our office in Omagh.

- In February 2021, free Wi-Fi vouchers delivered to three families, giving them free Internet access for 8 weeks, thanks to Home-Start UK's partnership with BT.

- And in February 2022, we launched Home-Start Omagh's first family group. Aimed at families with twins and triplets, the monthly Omagh Multiple Group took place in February and March thanks to funding from the Pears Foundation until June 2021. Lots of activities were planned for this group between February and June 2022.



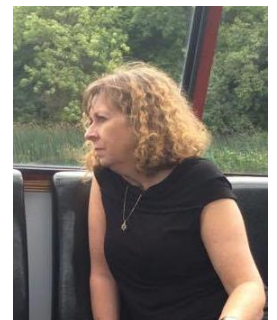
This was also a year of goodbyes, as Lily O'Donnell retired from our management committee after 21 years. Joanna Jarosz and Anne Lowry stepped down as active trustees, although they are staying on in an advisory capacity for our scheme. We want to thank those three wonderful ladies for their dedication over the years to the management of our charity.



And finally, I would like to acknowledge Bernie, who as the 2021-2022 year came to a close, tendered her resignation as Administrator. Bernie joined Home-Start Omagh District as a Home-Visiting Volunteer in 2014, and later that year took on the role of Administrator.



Over the course of almost 8 years with us, she was a passionate advocate for our charity and her commitment will be missed by all of us. We wish her well in her future endeavours, and thank her for all that she has done for us.



Case study



Katherine and Marie

Following the birth of her fourth child ten weeks premature, Katherine's health visitor suggested that she self-refer to Home-Start Omagh District for a volunteer to support her and the children. With her new-born baby on oxygen, and with three other children aged 1, 3 and 11 years, family life was challenging.



For the first couple of months after the premature birth of her fourth child, Katherine spent the week travelling to and from the hospital in Belfast over seventy miles away, whilst her other children were either in creche, reception class or at school, and then she was rushing back from the hospital to do the school pick-up.

On weekends, her brother-in-law would take the children so she could see the baby in hospital.

Once the baby was back at home, Katherine still had to go to regular appointment at the local hospital and in Belfast, as well as cope with emergency visits to the A&E almost thirty miles away when the baby's oxygen levels fell to dangerous levels.

That is when Katherine decided to make the self-referral to Home-Start, having already accessed the support several years prior with her eldest child.

The support from Home-Start Omagh has made all the difference to Katherine.

"With Marie's support, it means that I'm not trying to do 5 things at once.

I really look forward to the visits and it's just so easy. We naturally fall into a rhythm of what needs to be done and the fact that she is so lovely makes such a difference.

I feel that we have a good relationship. Towards the end of the visit, Marie will stop and have a cuppa and a chat with me, and those times are great, as I get some adult company"

Home-Start volunteer, Marie reflects on her volunteering experience and visits to Katherine's house

"Home-Start do a great job of social care for families that move to an area and don't know anyone. This can feel very isolating, so the friendship that the volunteer offers is priceless.

In fact, no other organization or service does what Home-Start do. It's something that other services don't do, and it's very different to any health visitor or mid-wife service.

I would have loved to have that support from a Home-Start volunteer when I had my 3 children.

It's great for me as much as it is helpful to the family. The children keep you busy so I can't think about anything else. And being a former teacher, it's easy for me to slip into supporting the children with homework.

I enjoy it and I make friends with the family and children; I know the families want me to come. I know the parent can have a time out and do something because of my visit.

And the great thing is that I've remained friends with some of the people that I have supported in the past and see them at Christmas time."



Our home-visiting volunteer team 2021-2022

Anne D, Barbara, Bernie, Eithne M, Hannah, Helen, Karen, Louise, Lynda, Marie, Maureen, Sinead, Therese.

“There are no amounts of words that could describe how helpful and valuable our volunteer was to us during a very difficult, and demanding, time. If only every new mum could avail of a volunteer in the 1st year!”

Family stories



“Absolutely fantastic. We had doorstep visits due to covid. The delivery of essentials was great, plus the clothes for our youngest as we were struggling to get him clothes. The wee chat and reassurance were a pick me up. My kids also loved the wee treats that were put in the box, it made their faces light up.”

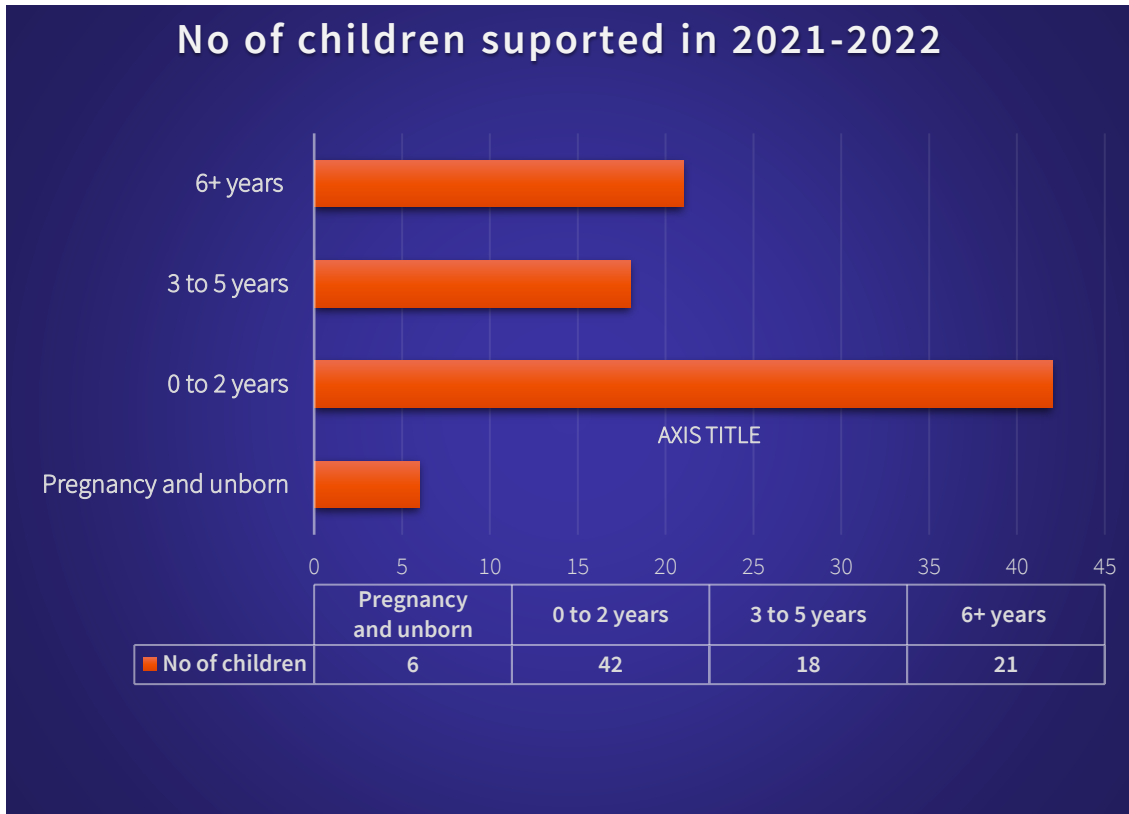
“I never expected to have so much support when the twins were born. My volunteer was fantastic and was a great help and company each week. I had only recently moved to the area so had no friends, or family close, so having someone just to chat with each week made me feel less isolated. I also appreciated the odd week where I would just take the opportunity to get some rest! The babies also enjoyed having a different face, and someone who had the energy to sing songs and read to them.

“I can honestly say I can't fault this team in any way, under the current circumstances they provided an exceptional service. Our volunteer was an absolute gem, she was friendly and playful with my children. She was thoughtful towards both them and me. I think these people are amazing for donating their time to such a wonderful cause.”

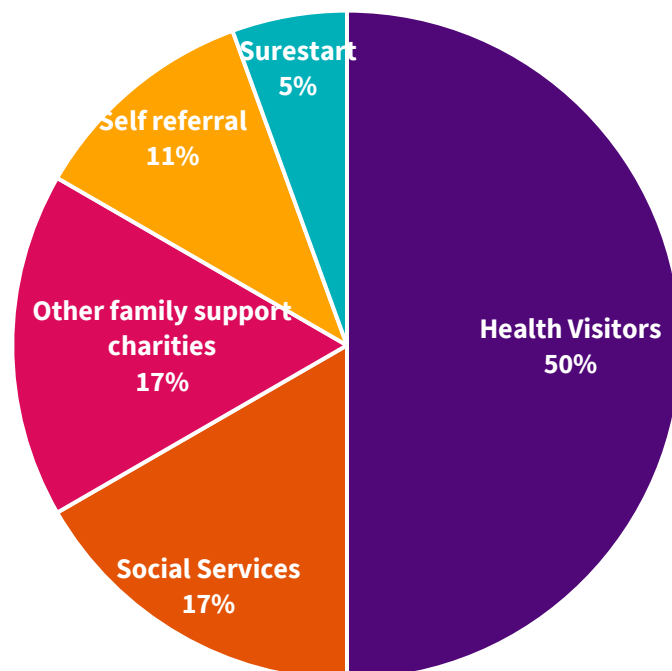
“I am Australian but was living in England with my husband when we discovered we were having twins. We decided to move to County Tyrone to be closer to his family for support. We moved when I was 20 weeks pregnant in the middle of lockdown, so we didn't see many people for most of the year after we moved. When the babies were born my mother-in-law was a great help, but she was really the only person I was seeing other than my husband. I hadn't had the chance to get out and make friends, plus lockdowns and social distancing made it harder. Having my volunteer come round once a week gave me someone new to speak to. There were really easy to chat with and quickly felt like an old friend, rather than someone I had just met. I'm back working full time so no longer have home visits, but I'm very grateful I had Home-Start Omagh to help me through a lonely time”



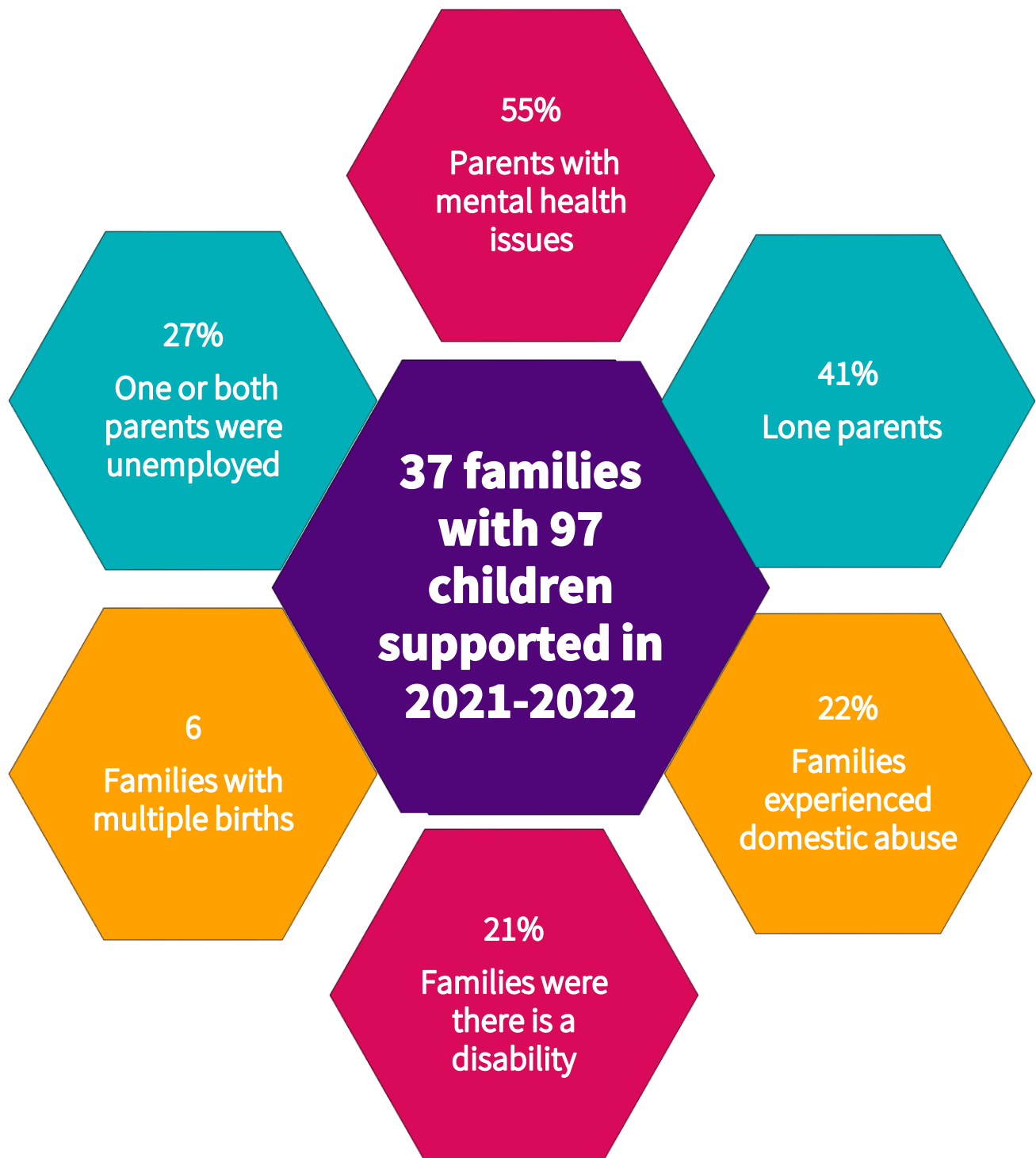
Families Supported 2020-2021



Source of referrals 2021-2022



This Year in Numbers



Family group activities in 2020-2021




**Speech and language
development for
babies
0-12 months**

Date: Tuesday 8th June 2021
Time: 11am to 12.30pm via Zoom
Hosted by Speech & Language therapist Lisa McGillion

To book a place, contact Allison on 078 4374 9852 (ring or text)
or email homestartomagh@btconnect.com




OMG! Omagh Multiples Group



**FREE Monthly group for families with
pre-school twins or triplets**

Last Friday of every month
10.30am to 12.30pm
MACCA Resource Centre, 21a Knockshee Park Omagh



For parents and grandparents: sit down, have a cup of coffee/tea and meet parents/grandparents who understand what it's like to have twins or triplets.



Parents expecting twins or triplets are very welcome.



For little ones.
Come along for play, activities and a snack.



Register or for more information, contact:
Home-Start Omagh District
Tel: 028 8224 0902
Text: 078 4374 9852
Email: coordinator@homestartomaghdistrict.org.uk

**Pears
Foundation**



**SAVE
THE
DATE**

OMG! MESSY PLAY SESSION

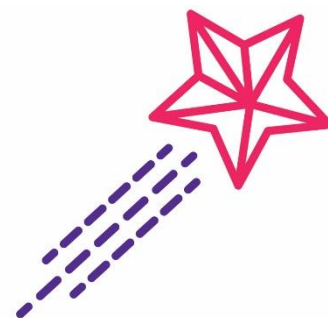
FRIDAY 11TH MARCH 2022

TO REGISTER PLEASE
PHONE OR TEXT
078 4374 9852

10.15AM TO 11.15AM

LIMITED SPACES AVAILABLE





FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH



Jayne Murray
Home-Start UK in Northern Ireland

jmurray@home-start.org.uk

Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
BELFAST, BT4 3SQ
Tel: 028 9052 2556
Email: private.office@health-ni.gov.uk

Your Ref:

Our Ref: CORR-2006-2021

Date: 17th June 2021

Dear *Saige*,

Thank you for your correspondence of 8 June 2021 regarding the findings of the Home Start UK's 'Home Is Where We Start From' report. Supporting children and their families is a key priority of my Department, and I want to thank you for sharing this work with us.

I understand you have met with officials in the Department's Family Policy Unit to discuss the report and how the knowledge and experience of Home Starts can support the work underway to develop a new Family and Parenting Support Strategy.

I also want to recognise the important work of Home Start volunteers to support families, particularly through the last 15 months. Please pass my thanks on to your colleagues in NI Home Starts for their contribution to the COVID-19 response.

Yours sincerely

Robin Swann MLA

Befriending volunteers Needed

Do you have 2-3 hours per week to support a family with young children?

Call Allison on 028 8224 0902
or 078 4374 9852 or email
info@homestartomaghdistrict.org.uk

Home-Start Omagh welcomes parents, or those with parenting experience, of all ages and backgrounds



CONTACT US



www.home-start.org.uk



info@homestartomaghdistrict.org.uk



028 8224 0902
078 4374 9852



MACCA Resource Centre,
21a Knockshee Park,
Omagh,
BT79 7PH



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