

Trustee/Director's Report April 2023

Achievements and Performance

Home-Start Antrim has been offering support to parents with young children in Antrim, Randalstown, Toomebridge, Crumlin, Templepatrick and Parkgate since October 1990. Volunteers are recruited, trained, and supported to provide support to families with children under 5 in three specific areas. Home support volunteers provide one-to one weekly friendship to individual families, providing compassionate and confidential support in whatever way they can. Other volunteers run our weekly family group nurturing supportive relationship and community in a family friendly environment. Another team of volunteers engage with different families each week providing practical assistance through provision of valuable resources at our weekly baby bank.

Our three service deliveries are outlined briefly below: -

Home-Support

Home support is changing. Since the pandemic we have found that families seem less keen to receive support in their own homes. Demand for group support has increased. We need to evaluate whether along with our large family group, smaller more specific group support may be more effective. We are also considering creating a comfortable meeting place where families can meet on a one-to one basis with their volunteer as an alternative to their own home. Meeting the needs of parents in a way that suits them is very much the focus of our planning as we look forward.

Family Group

Family group is thriving. We currently have 38 families on our register and a healthy attendance every week. We use the large sports hall as well as we can to provide an ideal environment for play, parent and child activities and importantly friendship. We have seen valuable relationships being built between parents and with volunteers too. After the isolation experienced by so many during COVID it has been so encouraging to see a valuable sense of community established. Many children who were initially withdrawn are now running in every week ready to play with their peers and becoming more ready for the big world of nursery school .A committed team of volunteers makes this all possible .

Antrim Baby Bank

This new project has almost doubled its output. In our second year we completed 296 referrals for practical help, 150 of these were families receiving help for the first time. Thanks to the generous donations of the general public and the commitment and hard work of our team of volunteers we continue to pass on valuable baby essentials and resources hoping to reduce the stress many families are experiencing at this time. This project reaches families from all backgrounds, and we now recognise that we may need to translate some of our information leaflets into other languages. The other focus of the baby bank is to signpost parents to other services in the town that are relevant to their needs and circumstances. As this project grows we may also consider creating a drop in where parents who have already connected with volunteers can come in for a friendly ear and a chat.

Looking forward.

As the needs increase we need new volunteers to help us with the work in front of us. It is my hope that in the Autumn we will be able to encourage more parents to attend our volunteer preparation course and join our community of helpers.

We continue to network other community groups such as MPDA, Oasis Foodbank, Sure-Start, Women's Aid, Parenting NI, Family Hub, CYPSP, Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council and several of the local churches. The need to support local families will always be there and working together with other services is most definitely the most effective way to make a real and permanent difference in our community.

Sharon Caldwell – Scheme Organiser