



Bracknell Forest Scheme News

ISSUE 1-16

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Home-Start UK praises our Scheme in QA review

By Tessa Dove, Scheme Organiser

It's official! We are an excellent Scheme, working to very high standards. Our recent Quality Assurance review recognised many areas of good practice within the Scheme but our volunteer supervision came under the heading of 'excellent practice' - which means that it will be shared with other Home-Starts via our intranet. The QA assessors were impressed that we regularly adapt our supervision questions to incorporate and share learning points, such as safeguarding updates and issues which are identified through supervisions, diary sheets and volunteer support meetings.

The review followed over a year of preparation, covering 8 aspects of the Scheme: Governance, Learning & Development, Finance, Staff, Volunteers, Information, Children and Families, and Partnerships.

Although much was already in place, the review made us ask 'What are we doing?', 'How are we doing it?' 'How can we do it better?' and 'What difference will it make?' We hope that a regular review of these questions will ensure that our support for children, families and our volunteers will continue to improve.

We would like to say a very big **thank you** to everyone who took part on the day, especially Hilary, our Chair, Gareth, our Treasurer and Jemma, Anne and Connie (volunteers), who were interviewed along with staff, families and referrers.

We have now received the final report and gained 100% compliance with all the requirements.

Scheme Update

Find out what has happening since our last newsletter Page 2

Children's Christmas Party

The day all the children met Father Christmas Page 3



Dates for your diary

2016											
January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
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New Volunteers and Rep

Come and meet our new recruits



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Scheme Update

- Following our move to the Open Learning Centre in August, September was spent busily adapting to all the changes: making sure everything was in place for Family Group's new venue, recruiting volunteers for our Prep course, and introducing existing volunteers to our new 'home'. Nicola, our Volunteer Rep, helped us out by accompanying Val to interviews for new volunteers and provided valuable feedback on the process.
- By October, our 28th Prep course was well under way with 11 participants including Julie, and Rosemary, one of our new Trustees. We also liaised with company partner, GE Power,



over Christmas presents for children we support to enable their staff to choose and wrap appropriate presents. Val and Tessa attended a Health Visitors locality meeting to update the Health Visiting Team (which has seen many changes over the last 18 months) about Home-Start and our referral process.

- November was busy with the continuing Prep course, ensuring we had things in place for our QA review and preparing for Christmas. We tried not to panic when our entertainer for the Christmas party had to let us down (in order to do Jury Service) and eventually managed to find a replacement. We also had the excitement of making a short film about Home-Start for the Kerith Community Carol Service. Luckily, Julie agreed to step in at the very last minute when I had no voice at all - and did a fantastic job!

- December rushed by in the usual flurry of activity: completing the Prep course, providing Safeguarding training for new volunteers, our Christmas social for staff, trustees and volunteers and the children's Christmas party. It was great to welcome our new volunteers to the team and fantastic to see so many of them willing to step in straight away to help at the Christmas party.

- After a very welcome break at Christmas, January was even busier than usual. Not only did we have all the post course follow-ups and

family placements for new volunteers to complete, but there were also the final preparations for our QA review to put in place, including submitting all the paperwork and arranging a timetable of interviews for all those involved.

- In February, Scheme staff and trustees, along with our

volunteer rep, Nicola, held our annual Away Day (in a room not very far away from the office!). The day was spent discussing and working on our aims for the coming year, how we measure the 'impact' of what we do and our communications strategy. We also held our first volunteer support meeting of the year, when our speaker, Jo Belsten, of the Speech and Language Team gave us excellent guidance on how we can assist parents to support their children's language development. February also brought the news of our proposed funding cut and, on a more positive note, our very successful QA review.

- If we thought the pressure was going to ease off in March, we were sadly mistaken, with the Family group Easter 'eggstravaganza' to prepare for, and funding cuts to fight. Tessa and Hilary (our Chair of trustees) also attended the Home-Start national conference, where there was the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with representatives of over 200 local schemes. Five volunteers attended Domestic Abuse training, possibly the last that will be freely available to us. The Easter weekend at least gave us all time for a break and a chance to re-charge our batteries.

All this, in addition to over 400 family support visits and 310 family attendances at Family Group (over 1400 hours of face to face contact with families) since our last newsletter!

Children's Christmas Party 2015

With a new venue, our 2015 Christmas party was an opportunity to make some

and distributing presents, setting up the hall and grotto, shopping for,



changes to what we do. Most of these would not have been noticed by those attending but made preparations (and clearing up!) much simpler and faster.

We were fortunate to have the help of 2 volunteers from Lloyds Register to sort and wrap presents, and blow up balloons for the Christmas party. This really helped us and the volunteers enjoyed their time with us and finding out more about our work.

Thanks especially must go to Val, Julie and to the Family Group staff (Sharon, Lynn and Helen) for all the work that went into preparing for the event but also to all of you who contributed in so many different ways -wrapping, sorting

preparing and serving food, supporting families at the party, being Father Christmas or an elf, taking photos for our records and to give to families and (very importantly) helping to clear up afterwards.

We are also very grateful to the organisations which supported us: the staff of GE Energy and members of All Saints' Church provided gifts for the children and Lloyd's Register who allowed 2 of their staff time off to help with our preparations.

Unfortunately, we had a last minute change to our entertainer this year. Jo Jingles who had provided very popular entertainment for last year's party had

to cancel due to a requirement to attend for Jury Service but we were fortunate to secure Moo Music who went down very well with families attending.

There were also changes to Father Christmas's grotto, which looked spectacular, and Lee, who was with us for a short time as a trustee, was a wonderful elf. The party was also attended by the Town Mayors of Bracknell and Sandhurst, who certainly entered into the Christmas spirit!



Easter Egg Hunt 2016

Always a popular event (possibly because there is a lot of chocolate involved!), this year's Easter egg hunt was no exception. With over 150 eggs donated by GE Energy and Reed Business Support we were able to distribute eggs to all the families currently being supported. Thanks once again to everyone who helped out with the deliveries. The children enjoyed making - and

filling - their Easter baskets with mini eggs hidden around the hall and we did notice a few adults helping them out with the eating.....!

We also distributed Easter holiday activity boxes to all children aged 2-11. These have been put together for the last 3 years by the children of Easthampstead Baptist Church for our families. These boxes of



easy, fun activities always go down well with families, especially on those cold, wet days, when finding something different to do can be a struggle.

Proposed Funding Cuts - what is happening?

2 days before our QA review in February, we received a phone call from the Local Authority to say that funding for the whole Early Help budget is to be cut, including a 50% (£30,500) cut to Home-Start's funding

This had happened because of additional cuts to the grant from central government which the LA heard about in mid-December, so came despite assurances in October that we are a valued part of the Early Help 'offer' in Bracknell Forest and our funding would remain at the same level for 2016-17.

Home-Start in Bracknell Forest has been very fortunate in the support it receives for core funding via a joint SLA (Service Level Agreement, a kind of informal contract) with Bracknell Forest Council and the Bracknell & Ascot Clinical Commissioning Group. Although the funding we receive has remained the same for a number of years (at least 4), we

have been successful in achieving efficiency savings which do not affect our service to families. However, with the increased cost of accommodation and room hire at OLC, and new charges being imposed for Local Authority training, it will be difficult to achieve further savings without a reduction in our service. We are therefore extremely grateful to all those of you who have taken the time to respond to the council's consultation, write to your councillor, or both. There are already signs that there has been surprise at the level of response, and **there is still time to respond to the consultation, which closes on 17th May**. If you, or the family you support wish to contribute to this, you can do so as part of the online process, or email me directly so that we can include the comments in our official response. There are signs that there is some movement in the level of cut we can expect so we should continue to keep up the pressure; we won't find

out until the middle of July. If the decision stands, our funding will be reduced from August.

In the meantime a small group of us are in contact with key councillors and officers at the council, trying to make the case for continued funding.

We are not complacent though; we are researching a list of trusts and funds we can apply to for additional monies and talking to other local schemes about opportunities for joint working and joint bids. Patricia has been a great help with the grant research already and if **we have anyone else interested in helping with this please let us know**. Training available and skills highly valued!

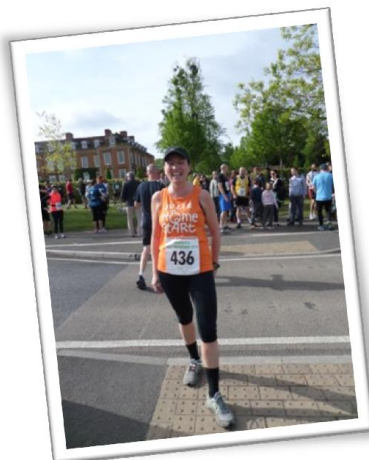
While we have to have contingency plans in place for this potential funding cut, we are determined that it will be 'business as usual' for families - and volunteers - in the meantime, and we are planning to be around for a long time to come!

Events and Training

Bracknell Half Marathon

takes place on Sunday 8th May this year, starting and finishing at South Hill Park. Julie has once again agreed to run on our behalf, along with a small team of runners in Home-Start vests. We do hope as many people as possible will support her, either by sponsoring her on

<https://mydonate.bt.com/fundraise/rs/juliepizzey1> or joining us on the



day to cheer her on. We will be at South Hill Park and would welcome any extra support but anyone able to provide encouragement along the route will be a great help!

Find us on 

DON'T FORGET WE ARE NOW ON FACEBOOK SO PLEASE LIKE AND FOLLOW US

Wednesday 22nd June sees the annual Teddy Bears' picnic held at Jock's Lane and Family Group will be meeting there this year. Please encourage families you are supporting to come along to this event. Further details will be circulated nearer the time. We will also be running a stall with an activity (probably playdough, as this was so popular last year), so may well be looking for 'bakers' and volunteers to man the stall nearer the time.

Our 23rd AGM will be held on **Thursday 7th July**, which is a chance to showcase our work and to say thank you to our volunteers. More details nearer the time but please put the date in your diaries!

Our 2016 Prep Course will begin on **Tuesday 4th October** at the Open



Learning Centre (OLC), running from 9.15am - 2.45pm for 6 weeks, excluding half term. If you know anyone who you think would make a good volunteer and would enjoy being a part of Home-Start, please tell them to get in touch.

Following the well-received session on mental health at April's volunteer support meeting, we will be running a longer session in the autumn on Friday 14th October

Volunteer Support Meetings

Our next volunteer support meeting will be held on **Monday 13th June**, and will be our annual safeguarding update. Please make every effort to attend this session and as we have to ensure every volunteer receives this information.

Volunteer support meetings will also take place on the following dates this year:

12th September and 14th November

(both are 2nd Mondays of the month)

We have a confirmed speaker for our 14th November meeting on the subject of 'Loan sharks' after Val and Tessa attended a recent talk on the subject

Our New Volunteers

We are pleased to welcome a fantastic group of new volunteers, who completed their course in early December. Most are now linked with families and discovering for

themselves the rewards (and occasional frustrations!) of being a Home-Start volunteer. We would like to welcome the following volunteers and hope they enjoy a

long and rewarding time as part of the Home-Start team: Rhian, Caroline, Judi, Wendy, Diana, Leticia, Jemma, Julie P, Fay

And Finally.....

We are sorry to say goodbye to: Julie W, Jackie, Jane, Marlize and Katie. We would like to say a big thank you to you all and wish you well for the future. Don't forget to keep in touch!

Thank you to everyone involved with Home-Start Bracknell Forest for all your support over the last year - we'd have been lost without you! You are a fantastic group of people, who already give so much of your time and energy to the charity and we are

delighted your work has been recognised in the Pride of Bracknell Awards when we were voted runners-up in the 'Team of the Year Category'. Thank you to everyone who made a nomination

