HOME START
Bracknell Forest



Annual Report 2025

April 2025 – March 2026

There for parents when they need us most, because childhood can't wait

About us

Our ethos

Home-Start Bracknell Forest has been supporting families locally for **33 years**.

We are an early help, family support charity, helping families with young children deal with whatever life throws at them. We support families affected by **isolation, bereavement, illness, mental health, financial issues, insecurities** and more. Our community of trained and supervised volunteers, and support programmes, help families through their toughest times.

Home-Start works because our volunteers understand how hard parenting can be. They work alongside parents to help them cope with the stress and strains of life and make sure they have the skills, confidence and strength they need to nurture their children. **Because childhood can't wait.**

Our mission

To provide emotional and practical support to local families with young children, helping families build confidence, strengthen their relationships with their children and widen their links with their local community.



Our Pillars:

- **Empowering:** we work in a spirit of openness and acceptance in order to build each family's confidence and self-esteem.
- **Peer-to-peer:** we encourage parents to support other parents, through volunteering and through engaging in groups and activities.
- **Reliable**: we recruit, train and support our core of volunteers to build trusting, non-judgemental relationships with families.
- **Holistic**: we support the whole family to enhance the health and wellbeing of parents, carers and children, according to their needs.
- **Responsive:** we develop new services to respond to changing and emerging needs of the community we serve.
- **Collaborative:** we work in close partnership with local government, family support agencies, businesses and the community.

Our 4 Strategic Commitments

Impact

To build a sustainable, reliable service

Inclusion

To ensure our services are accessible and inclusive

Voice

To raise awareness of the positive impact of our service

Growth

To increase our capacity to support the diverse needs of families

Contact us

www.hsbf.org.uk 01344 860025 facebook.com/HomeStartBF x.com/homestartbrack homestartbracknellforest

Home-Start Bracknell Forest, The Bracknell Open Learning Centre, Rectory Lane, Bracknell, RG12 7GR

Home-Start Bracknell Forest is a registered charity no. 1160447

Welcome to Our Review of 2025-2026

Chair of Trustees' Review



The community of Bracknell Forest is growing and diversifying. As new families move into the borough, they bring an increasing need for our support. Our amazing volunteers give their time, energy and compassion to support families across Bracknell Forest. They help parents build confidence, reduce isolation and create brighter futures for their children. The fact that this support is given freely through friendship, rather than as a statutory responsibility, makes it incredibly valuable. The feedback we receive from families who have had the support of a home-visiting volunteer, or who have attended one of our groups, shows overwhelming gratitude.

It is gratifying that the impact of Home-Start's support is recognised in the wider community, so we were proud to be nominated for the King's Award for Voluntary Service – the highest award given to volunteer groups across the UK. Our nomination certificate was presented by the Lord-Lieutenant to our Head of Service, Sharon Kearins, and volunteer Anne Jenkins. A few months later, Anne received the Gold Award for Long-Standing Service to the Community at the Pride of Bracknell Awards 2026, in recognition of her 25 years as a Home-Start volunteer.

The number of Quality Assurance Badges we have received from Home-Start UK has steadily increased and we have received some excellent feedback. This QA procedure covers all aspects of HSBF's work, including operational procedures and governance. It is rewarding to have this quality confirmed and provides recognition of the dedication of the whole HSBF team of staff, trustees and volunteers.

Finding secure long-term funding to continue our core service is a big challenge as competition for funding increases, and changes to application criteria shrink the pool of money available. We are particularly grateful for the continued support of Bracknell Forest Council, who fund approximately a third of our annual costs, and for the consistent funding and support of the Town and Parish Councils. We also receive generous support from several local businesses, through financial donations and fundraising on our behalf.

Long-standing support and relationships with local voluntary and faith communities have flourished and we value the opportunity to work in partnership with these organisations to improve outcomes for local families.

Many thanks to everyone who has supported the work of Home-Start Bracknell Forest throughout the last year.

Rosemay Gunner, Chair

Head of Service update



Home-Start Bracknell Forest is proud to be part of the Early Help offer in Bracknell Forest, providing trusted, relationship-based support when families need it most. In 2025–26, we received **198** new referrals, supported **212** families and reached **497** individuals. Through home-visiting, support groups and targeted courses, families have built confidence, reduced isolation and strengthened the relationships that help children thrive.

This year's data highlights the increasing complexity of family need. Among families receiving home-visiting support**, 93%** of caregivers reported struggling with their **mental health** and **90%** experienced **loneliness or social isolation**. Many families are also facing financial pressures, challenges with daily routines and parental health concerns, often managing several difficulties at the same time.

Emerging needs are also evident through our group work, with more children presenting with communication, and social or emotional development challenges. We are also supporting more families who are new to the area or for whom English is not their first language, reinforcing the need for accessible and inclusive support.

I would like to thank our volunteers, whose **2,096** hours of dedication and kindness made a significant difference this year. My thanks also go to our partners across health, education, children's services, community organisations and funders for their continued collaboration and trust.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to strengthening volunteer capacity and training, maintaining high-quality group provision, and deepening partnership working to ensure families can access timely support before challenges escalate. Through this continued focus on early intervention and collaboration, we will build on our achievements and continue making a lasting difference to parents, children and families across Bracknell Forest.

Sharon Kearins, Head of Service

15
Staff & Trustees

36
Volunteers

2096
Volunteer hours

212
Families accessed support

Understanding the needs of families in Bracknell Forest



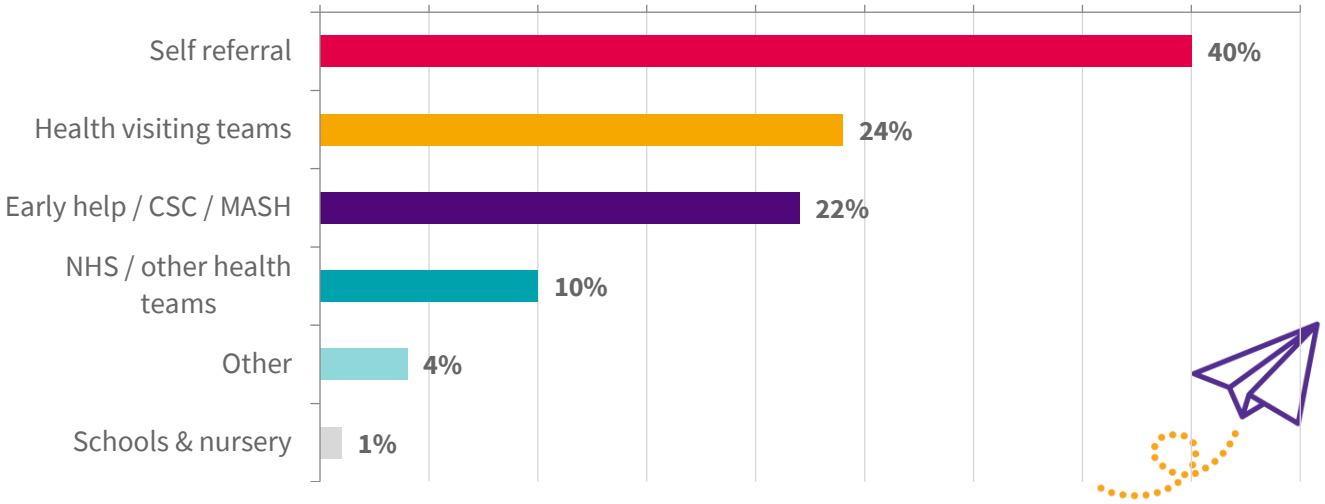
Tracking new family referrals:

Number of new families looking for support, by origin of contact:

198

referrals received

Top 3 routes = 86%

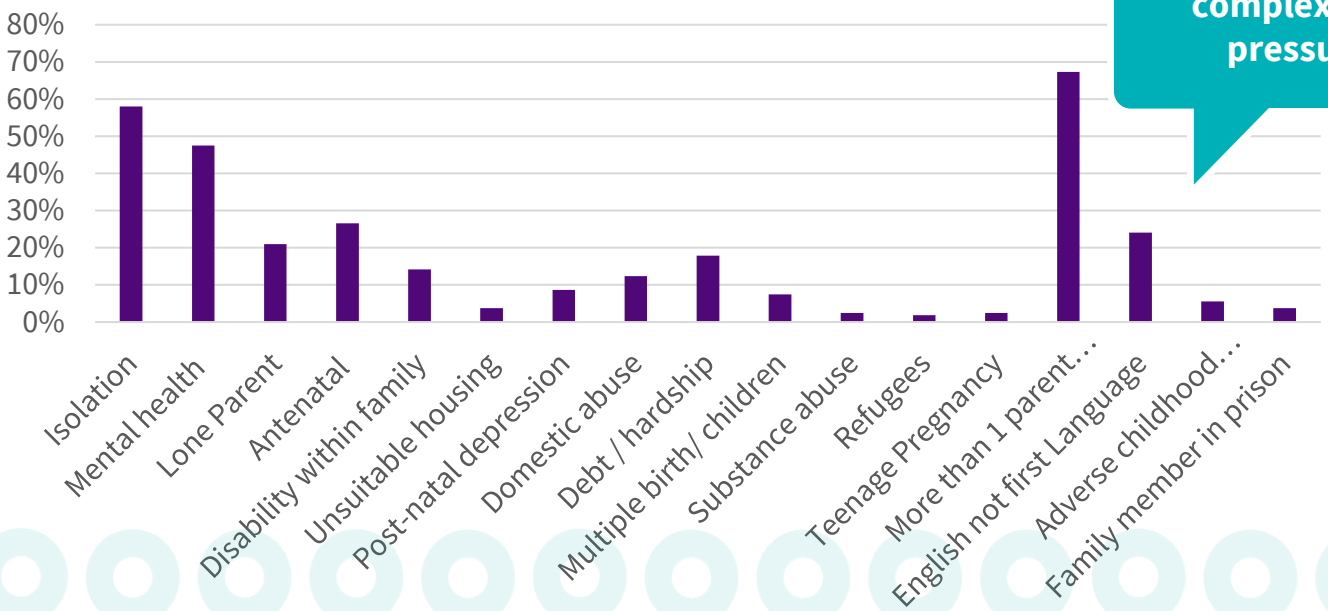


Self-referrals continue to drive demand

Tracking family circumstances:

Circumstances experienced by families at referral

Families most often face isolation, mental health struggles, and complex social pressures.

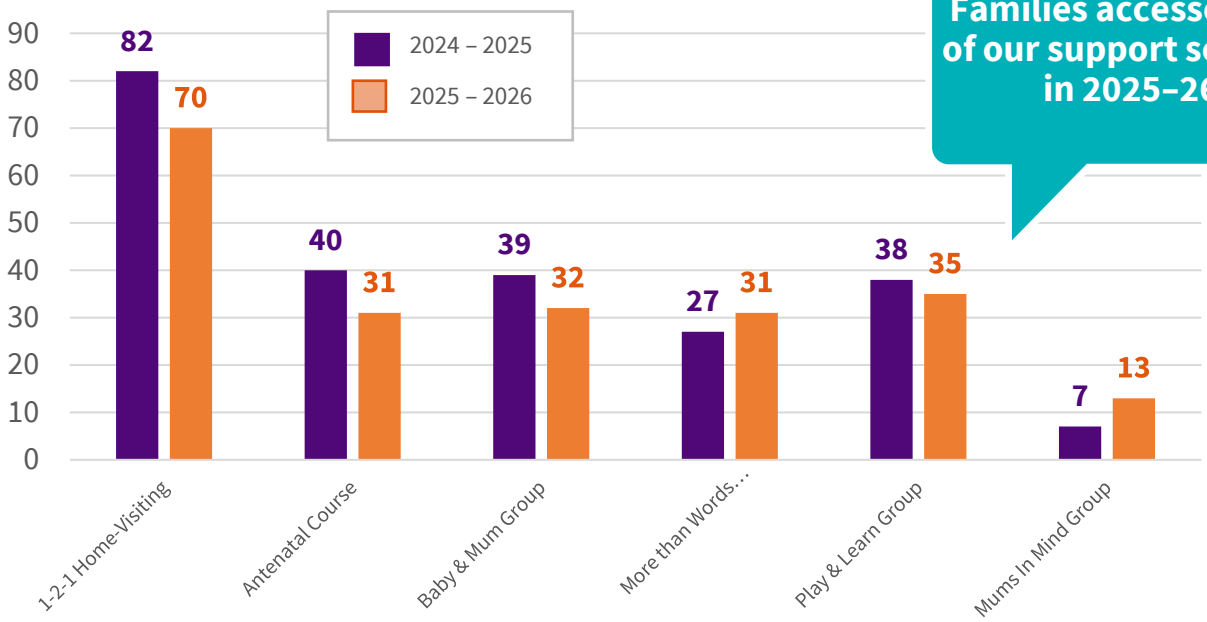


Which Home-Start services are families accessing?

Number of families benefiting from 1-2-1 core support, group support, and targeted courses:

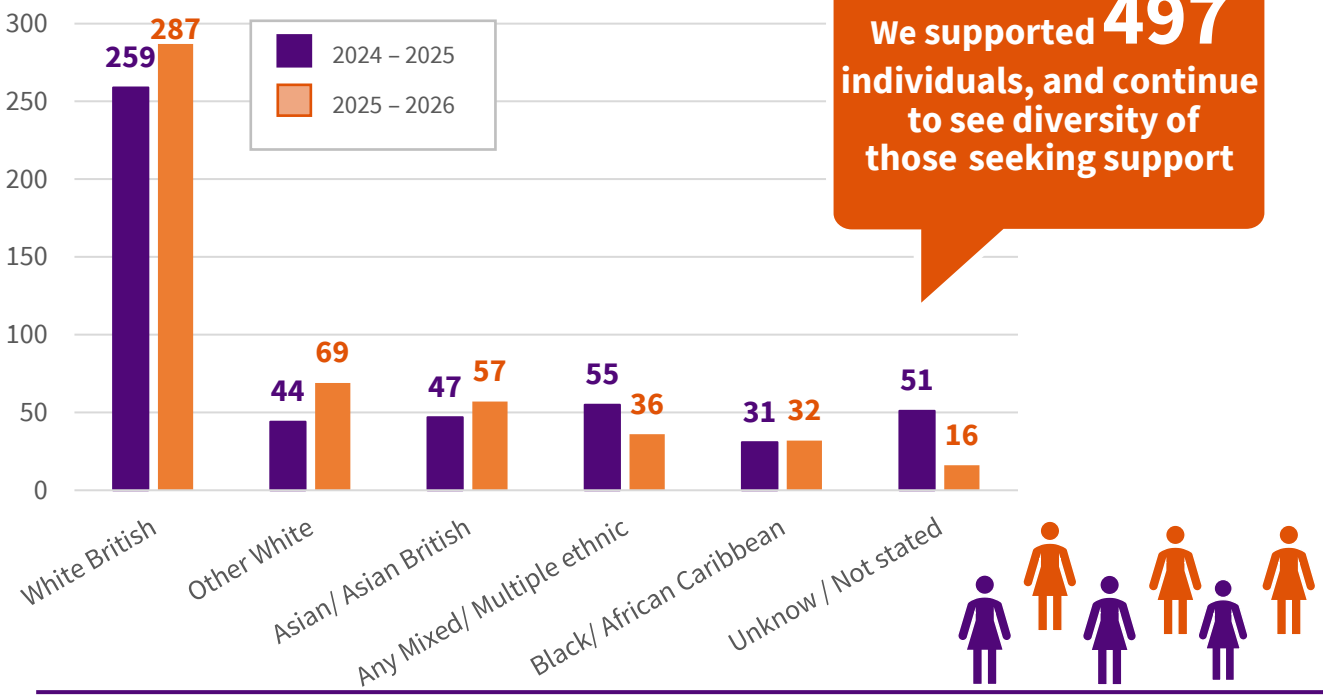
212

Families accessed one of our support services in 2025–26



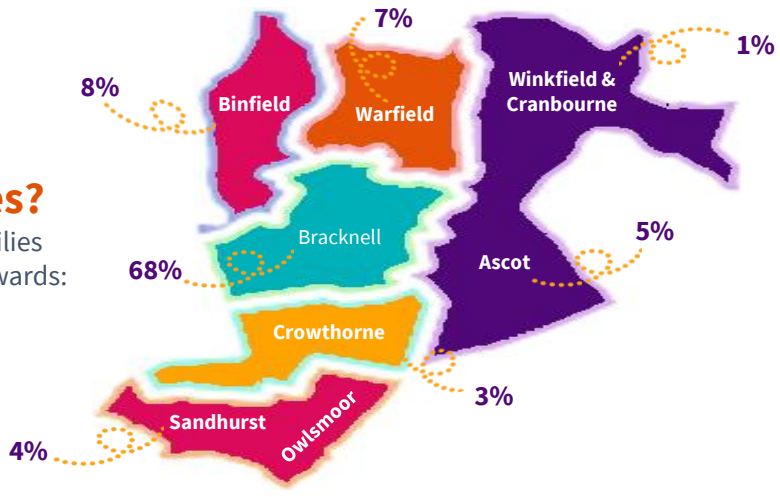
Ethnicity within our supported families:

We supported 497 individuals, and continue to see diversity of those seeking support



Where in Bracknell Forest are Home-Start's supported families?

Percentage of supported families by Bracknell Forest borough wards:



1-2-1 volunteer-led home-visiting support



70
Families received home-visiting support

129
Children were nurtured through support

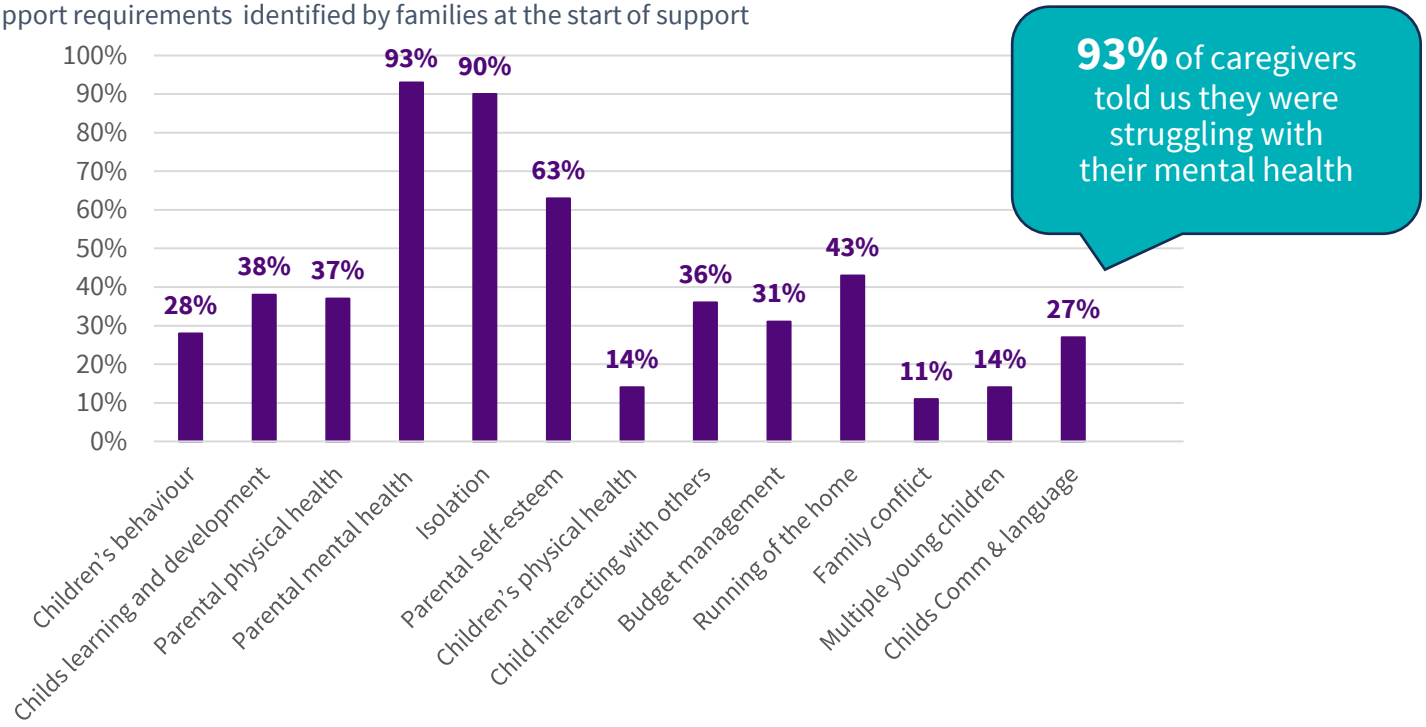
36
Volunteers gave over 2,000 hours of family support

Our one-to-one volunteer home-visiting service remains at the heart of Home-Start Bracknell Forest, providing personalised, compassionate support to families facing complex challenges.
Our trained and supervised volunteers visit families weekly, building trusted, non-judgemental relationships that help parents feel listened to and supported. They provide **emotional and practical support, helping parents manage low mood and anxiety, reduce isolation, strengthen parenting skills, establish routines, access local services and community activities, and overcome practical barriers.**
This relationship-based approach helps parents build confidence, resilience and coping strategies, creating more stable, nurturing home environments and improving outcomes for both parents and their children.
During 2025–26, we supported **70** families whose needs remained high. Parental mental health affected **93%** of families, while **90%** experienced social isolation, showing the ongoing need for emotional support and opportunities to build confidence and community connections. Low parental self-esteem affected **63%** of families, and **43%** needed help running the home. Financial pressures also remained significant, with **31%** requiring budgeting support. Children's needs were also clear: **36%** needed support to develop social skills and **27%** needed help with communication and language development. Many families faced several challenges at once, reinforcing the importance of flexible, holistic support.

"I can't say enough how important the support from my volunteer has been to me. I was struggling more than ever in my life, and the social, practical, emotional support has made all the difference". *Mum supported via home-visiting volunteer*

Family support Needs

Support requirements identified by families at the start of support



93% of caregivers told us they were struggling with their mental health

2025-2026 home-visiting support needs and impact

Percentage of families who achieved a significant positive outcome in 2025–26

At the start of our support, families score themselves on a scale from 1 to 5 on how well they are coping in specific areas. We are proud to report that **100% of families have seen improvements** in their circumstances and areas of need. Significant improvement, defined as an increase of at least 2 points on this scale, was reported by the following percentages of families in each area:



89%
Coping with loneliness and social isolation



92%
Improvement in own mental health

78%
Parent's confidence and self-esteem



80%
Managing the day-to-day running of the house





75%
Coping with extra work of multiple children under 5 years



75%
Being involved in their child's development, early learning and socialisation



100%
of families said the support from their volunteer made a difference

265
Signposting to other services







Specialist Programmes and Group Support



Baby and Mum Group

This group played a vital role in supporting new mothers experiencing **isolation, poor mental health and anxiety** following the birth of their child. Upon joining the group, **100% of participating mothers reported feelings of loneliness.**

Three 10-week groups were delivered, supporting 32 new mothers and their babies, including those with multiple births. The group provided a **safe and welcoming space** where mothers gradually built the confidence to share their experiences, receive **peer support**, and develop meaningful friendships.

Volunteers were on hand to provide support, particularly for parents with multiple births and to give parents time to recharge when needed.

In addition, mothers received professional guidance and support from external specialists including **baby massage, weaning and sleep support, and childcare provision options.**

32 Mums and their babies attended	**100%** felt less lonely and isolated
100% better understood their baby's development	**90%** improved mental health

Weekly Family Play and Learn Group

While supporting children's **social and emotional development**, this group also addressed key challenges faced by their parents—including **poor mental health, social isolation**, and **limited access to local support networks**.

This inclusive and welcoming group attracted a **diverse range of families**, including neurodiverse children, families with multiple births and families where English is not a first language.

Over the course of the year, 35 families attended the weekly sessions. The group supported parents in engaging more confidently with their children and with one another, creating a **safe and supportive space for learning, connection, and friendship**.

Families reported a significant improvement in both their own and their child's confidence.

35 families attended weekly sessions	**93%** improvement in their child's social and communication skills
90% were better able to manage their child's behaviour	**100%** of parents improved their bond with their child



142

Families received support through our Groups and courses

Mums in Mind

Funded by the Big Lottery, Mums in Mind is a six-week programme supporting mothers of young children who are experiencing **challenges with their mental health, including anxiety, low confidence, and negative thinking.**
Across two courses, 13 mums took part in a safe and welcoming environment, learning practical **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques and strategies to support their wellbeing**. The programme also provided valuable peer support, helping participants connect with others facing similar challenges.
A **free on-site crèche** enabled mothers to fully engage in the sessions and focus on their own wellbeing.

"Home-Start and the other mums in the group have been a huge support. I felt heard, cared for and respected, and my worries eased when I arrived. Over the last six weeks, I've learnt a lot about myself and become more assertive. The group has also helped improve my relationship with my partner by giving me the confidence to speak up and share my feelings."

More than Words, Early Years Language and Communication Group

31 caregivers supported through our inclusive early communication programme.

This group played an important role in supporting caregivers who had concerns about their child's early **speech, language, and communication development.**
Through an **informal, play-based environment**, we provided learning opportunities and modelled activities that families could use at home to support their child's development.
Many of the children attending had diagnosed or emerging additional needs. A total of 31 caregivers accessed the programme, working alongside their children in a supportive and inclusive environment.

"I'm very pleased to have had the opportunity to join the group with my child. It has made a great impact on my son's life, and we are very thankful for all the support the team has shown me."

31 families attended weekly sessions	**100%** were more confident supporting their child's communication
93% saw an improvement in their child's response to instructions	**79%** saw an improvement in their child's behaviour

Antenatal Courses for Dads-to-Be and Mums-to-Be

Our half-day antenatal courses for expectant mums and dads are **delivered as separate, tailored sessions** to meet the distinct needs of each group. This ensures both mums-to-be and dads-to-be receive relevant, focused support in a comfortable space where they can speak openly and ask questions with confidence.
Delivering sessions separately also **strengthens inclusivity**, particularly for those preparing for parenthood alone, helping to reduce the isolation that can arise in mixed groups.
Last year, we ran two antenatal courses with 31 attendees. Feedback showed strong appreciation for the **separate groups for mums and dads, which participants found supportive, relatable and confidence-building.**

"I really appreciated the course being tailored for dads and delivered by a male facilitator" .

Bracknell Forest expectant father

From Overwhelmed to Empowered: A Dad's Story

How Home-Start Bracknell Forest Helped a Dad Find His Confidence

"Becoming a parent was one of the biggest shocks I've ever experienced" – and I don't say that lightly. You think you know what having a baby will be like, but nothing really prepares you for what it actually feels like when it happens. The first few days after Ivy was born were overwhelming. Life changed instantly and completely, and I struggled to adjust to that change. I'm autistic, and while I can cope with change, I need time to understand it properly in order to regulate how I respond emotionally. I found myself becoming very overstimulated, particularly by Ivy crying in the early weeks; the crying affected me in a way I wasn't expecting. I would feel anxious and even have heart palpitations.

With a newborn, everything feels unpredictable. You might feel like you've found a routine one week, only for it to disappear the next. Even simple things like getting up in the morning, showering, or getting dressed became unpredictable, especially if we hadn't slept well. It wasn't that I regretted becoming a parent, but **"I genuinely worried about whether I was capable of doing this."**
My confidence was very low. I wasn't thinking weeks or months ahead – I was just trying to get through the next few hours.

That's when I reached out to Home-Start Bracknell Forest. I needed guidance and reassurance. I needed help to believe that things could get better and that I would eventually feel comfortable as a parent. I knew Home-Start wasn't therapy, but talking regularly to someone who was calm, non-judgemental and respectful made an enormous difference.
At that time, my wife was recovering from giving birth and facing her own challenges as a first-time mum. While I could speak to my family, it wasn't always easy to say how bad things felt, especially when I worried about their reactions.

My volunteer, Mandy, was incredible. She brought both practical experience and emotional support. She shared tips, resources, videos, and ideas that had worked for other families. These small, practical suggestions often made a real difference when we were facing a particular challenge. Just having those options helped me feel less lost as a first-time parent.

"Home-Start Bracknell Forest didn't just help me – it helped my whole family"

But more than that, Mandy was someone I felt comfortable with. She never judged what I shared or pushed her own opinions.
Sometimes I found myself over-analysing things – like whether we could ever have a second child – and Mandy helped me separate how I felt in the moment from what I truly believed long-term.

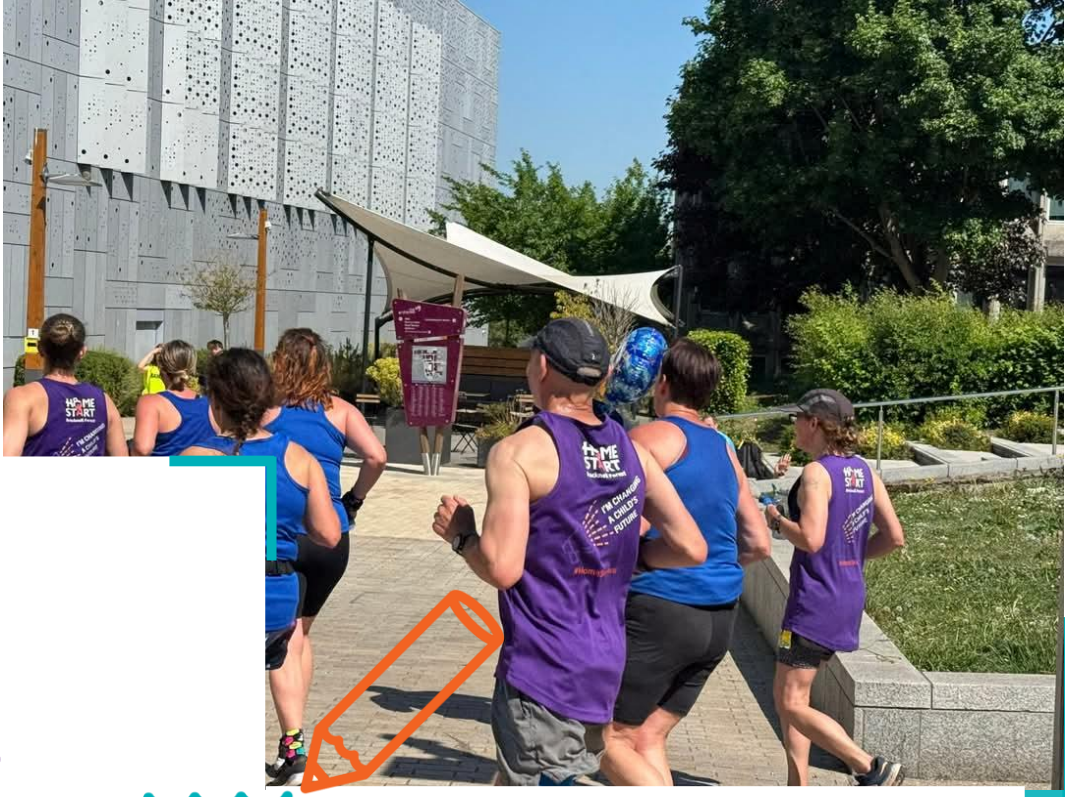
There was one particular day when Ivy was inconsolable, and I couldn't settle her at home. Mandy suggested putting her in the pushchair and going for a walk. Ivy fell asleep, and the whole evening improved after that. At the time, I wouldn't have thought of that myself. That experience taught me something important: **"I have options. There are tools I can use."** That realisation stuck with me.

As time went on, Home-Start Bracknell Forest helped me see parenting more realistically. I began to understand that bad days don't last forever. Sleep regressions pass. Routines change again. Often, those difficult phases come with positives, like Ivy developing new skills. With support, I learned to remind myself of that rather than feeling trapped in the hard moments.

As a dad, I think it's important to say this**: "Men need support too!"** I never felt judged or dismissed because I wasn't the mum. The feelings I had in those early days were real and valid, and similar to what many mothers experience. I think more dads probably feel this way than we talk about.

Now, I'm in a much better place. I feel like I can do this. Home-Start Bracknell Forest didn't just help me – it helped our whole family. Home-Start stepped in when I needed it most and gave me exactly the support I needed. I'm incredibly grateful. One day, I'd even consider volunteering myself, to support other dads who might be feeling the same way I did.

By Ben
From a family supported by Home-Start Bracknell Forest



Annual Financial Report 2025-2026

Financial Overview

The 2025–2026 financial year has been one of stability for Home-Start Bracknell Forest. While fundraising has been more challenging than in the previous year, we remain in a strong financial position and have delivered key developments that support long-term sustainability.
We took a proactive approach to fundraising, securing grants, parish council funding and one-off donations from the community and our supporters. These partnerships will help strengthen our financial resilience in the year ahead.

Strategic Partnerships

Our key partnerships continue to provide a strong financial foundation. Our SLA with Bracknell Forest Council runs until July 2029 and provides £60,000 per year to deliver our core one-to-one volunteer home-visiting service.

We also continued our partnership with Home-Start Berkshire East and Home-Start Reading and are now in the third and final year of National Lottery funding to support expectant parents and families with children under five.

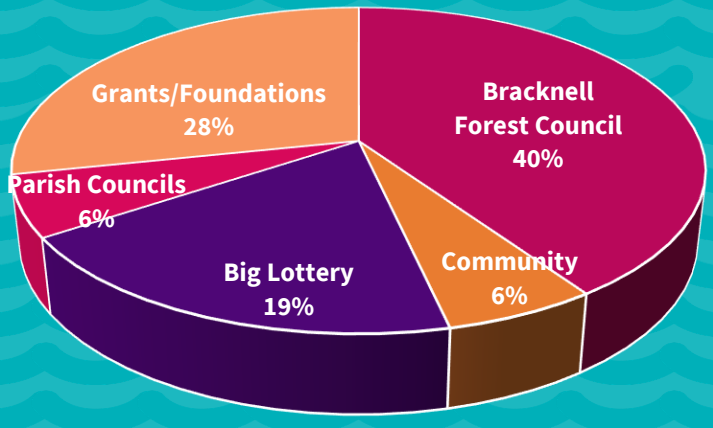
Looking Ahead

Our year-end financial position remains stable, with projected expenditure of £177,000 for the coming year. We have set a fundraising target of £65,000 to support the continued delivery of our services while maintaining six months' reserves. Our priorities include securing continuation funding from the National Lottery for our partnership projects and maintaining a strong pipeline of trust and foundation grant applications.

Financial Highlights

- **Income:** Total income was **£152,040**, a 24% decrease on the previous year.
- **Trusts and foundations** remained our largest source of income.
- **Financial management:** Improved cost-base and payment-schedule visibility strengthened cash flow management.
- **Fundraising:** We introduced a new fundraising strategy and Financial Management Policy.
- **Community support:** Local organisations, businesses and individuals helped provide a solid foundation for services.

YE 2025-2026 Income Sources



Summary Accounts	2025-2026	2024-2025
Opening balance 1st April	£96,307	£55,765
Income	£152,040	£200,866
Expenditure	£167,286	£160,324
Closing balance 31st March	£81,060	£96,307

Thank you to our Funders and Fundraisers

HOME START Bracknell Forest

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has supported us over the last year.

Your continued support and kindness have empowered us to assist hundreds of local families throughout the past year during difficult and challenging times. In particular, we would like to thank:

Abri Homes
Admiral Cunningham
Albert Hunt Foundation
All Saints' Church Ascot Heath
Berkshire Community Foundation
Binfield Parish Council
Bracknell Forest Council
Bracknell Lottery
Bracknell Town Council
Bracknell Town Mayor
Cadent Gas
Co-op
Crowthorne Baptist Church
Donors via People's Fundraising
Dunelm
Easthampstead Baptist Church
Easthampstead Rotary Club
Frogs and Friends
Home-Start UK
International Copiers
Kelly Family Charitable Trust
King's Academy EP
Lapland UK
Masonic Charitable Trust
Pears Foundation
Sandhurst Town Council
Sargam Performing Arts Centre
Souter Charitable Trust
St Michael's Runners
Tangent
Telana
Tesco Martins Heron
Tesco Warfield
The National Lottery
Waitrose & Partners
Warfield Parish Council
Winkfield Parish Council



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