

## STORY OF A VOLUNTEER

Six years ago I'd never heard of Home-Start. Then things went horribly wrong for me when shortly after losing my Mum, my husband was killed in a tragic accident, leaving me with a little girl who wasn't quite two. Two days after my husband's untimely death, I discovered I was pregnant. I was shell-shocked. This was followed by some incredibly dark days throughout which I shut down, I was barely able to function as a human being let alone be a parent to a small child who'd just lost their Daddy she worshipped, or Mummy to a new baby. Realising I was going to have to face being a lone parent to two small children knocked me sideways; I'd never felt so alone or so afraid of life and the things we all do daily without a second thought.

Things were bleak; I needed help. I didn't know what help I wanted or needed or more significantly where to find it. I cannot remember who referred me to Home-Start, but I thank my lucky stars that they did.

A lovely lady arrived at my house, she explained what Home-Start was all about and that somebody, a volunteer, would come to my house for a couple of hours a week and that what we did during our time was basically down to me and what I felt able to cope with. Home-Start brought to my door the first glimmer of light that I'd seen in a very long time.

My volunteer was marvellous. There was no pressure, it was very informal and at no time did I ever feel like I was being a nuisance, because in my mind, I became painfully aware that people must have been sick of listening to me going over and over the events that had brought me to this dreadful situation.

My first volunteer was incredibly kind, understanding and supportive - a real God-send. After my second daughter was born, she drove my eldest daughter, my new-born and I to our appointments at Derby Hospital. I could never have done that at the time for myself. Something so mundane and simple that most people (myself included now) take for granted that you can do for yourself.

My volunteer helped me get my confidence back. Lacking confidence was a very alien concept to me and it left me feeling extremely vulnerable. I think Home-Start basically helped to put a very broken me back together again, gently and slowly and with plenty of understanding.

It was so good, too, having different events organised by Home-Start for me to go to with my girls, but with my volunteer by my side for support so I didn't feel isolated, self-conscious or lonely. It was after losing my husband I understood the meaning of feeling alone in a crowd. My volunteer really stepped into the empty shoes that my Mum had left.

Sadly, my volunteer had to leave Home-Start due to an increased demand on her time from her business. This came as quite a shock to me, but I was promised another volunteer.

My second volunteer was equally wonderful to have around, so much so that as I became emotionally stronger and my baby became five and I reluctantly had to forego my volunteer, ( I cried when I realised I had to lose Home-Start because my youngest child was five) my volunteer and I have remained friends which, for me, is wonderful.

It's six years this year since my wonderful husband was taken so cruelly from his family, but thanks to Home-Start we're coping now. We still have the odd wobble but who doesn't now and again - it's what makes us human.

I found Home-Start so inspirational....that, and I was so upset to no longer be a part of the organisation....I signed up as a volunteer!

I have completed the prep course and have now been able to start to support other families going through tough times, apart from the totally selfish aspect of what I still get out of Home-Start albeit from the other side of the fence, it's good to feel like I'm giving something back to such a worthwhile cause that gave so much to me when I desperately needed it. I dread to think what could have happened without Home-Start. Now my youngest is at school, Home-Start has given me new purpose.....Home-Start is incredibly beneficial, not just for the families who need the support but for the volunteers too. Home-Start for me is like an extended family....because I don't have much real family anymore. Long Live Home-Start.....one thing that the government got right!