

Case Study from the 2020 pandemic

The family and their story

Mum, Dad, and their 2 sons (C1 aged 5 and C2 a new baby) were referred to Home-Start AWA by the Community Midwifery Team from the local hospital.

Mum had recently given birth to her second son and was suffering with mental and physical health issues. Mum had Chronic Fatigue (ME) and was receiving support from the Specialist Perinatal Mental Health Team. Dad had Asperger's and was able to offer minimal support around the home. Mum felt extremely tired and lacked support. There was a strained relationship with immediate family, which had an impact on Mum's mental health, increasing anxiety. Mum felt like a failure as a parent. Having received support in the past from Home-Start, Mum felt since having her second child, additional support would be beneficial.

What they hoped for from Home-Start

Mum wanted emotional support and some guidance with looking at additional help for her mental health. Mum wanted help with socialising and meeting other parents to start integrating in her local community.

The right volunteer

Home-Start volunteer Denise was a Nurse before she retired and felt she had time to give back to her local community by volunteering with families. She had experience of working as a Nurse, and with her medical background, understood the conditions affecting both parents in the family. Denise was well placed to support Mum's mental health and respond to Mum's feelings and help to build up her ability to start to engage socially again.

The support

Denise was introduced to Mum just prior to the first lockdown in March 2020. Support had to be provided at a distance, and Denise's weekly telephone calls to Mum were a lifeline, particularly as her mental health deteriorated during this time. Mum felt increasingly isolated, her feelings of anxiety heightened due to fear of catching Coronavirus. During this time Mum developed a pulmonary embolism, requiring hospital treatment, this had further negative impact on Mum's mental health. C2 started weaning and many food allergies emerged. Mum became anxious about what food groups she could offer him. This meant attending Dietician appointments, which proved stressful. The telephone support Denise was able to offer enabled Mum to chat about how she was feeling and gain emotional support. Home-Start supported the family by providing regular 'Packs of Joy', for example bags containing books and activities to entertain the children. The family enjoyed using these immensely. As C1 was at home due to school closures, he was kept busy with garden toys to enjoy outside during the summer. Mum said the Packs helped her with ideas of how to entertain the children, and their doorstep delivery was something to look forward to.

During the pandemic, with Denise and Home-Start staff member Emma's support, Mum contacted mental health charity MIND, and was able to access their service, gaining additional support for her mental health. Once the restrictions were lifted, Denise and Mum arranged to meet up outside and went for regular Buggy Walks together, this was a positive step in Home-Start being able to provide face-to-face safe support. Mum enjoyed meeting Denise outside at a social distance. Volunteer Denise was able to see C2 walk, a lovely experience, as she had been missing seeing these milestones in person. Mum enjoyed getting out for exercise and fresh air, and noticed the positive impact that seeing Denise in person had on her wellbeing and care for her boys.

Family's view on how Home-Start helped

Mum said: "...Having phone support during the Covid-19 Lockdown has been a lifeline to me. I have felt quite desperate at times, but knowing I had someone to talk to, gave me reassurance and helped me to manage the feelings of anxiety I have been experiencing."