



**HOME
START**
Southwark

Changing children's futures
in Southwark and Lewisham
2024-2025

Home-Start Southwark is entirely reliant on donations and grants to train volunteers and supply an ever-increasing number of families with the support they need. Every donation made to Home-Start Southwark, whatever the size, is truly appreciated because it helps us to be able to make a difference.

Your contribution can go a long way...

To donate:

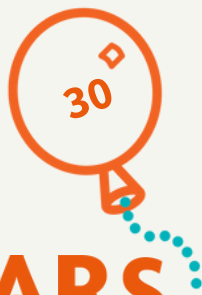


To get support:



To volunteer:





THIRTY YEARS

of changing children's futures

For thirty years, Home-Start Southwark has championed the belief that the best way to change a child's future is to support their parents, believing in the power of early relationships to shape strong futures.

Every child deserves the chance to grow up happy, healthy, and curious, but for too many, the odds are stacked against them. Circumstances like poverty, poor housing, family breakdown, and mental health worries leave families feeling overwhelmed and isolated.

In homes and at the heart of communities in Southwark and Lewisham, our volunteers offer practical help and a listening ear, supporting parents so they can give their children the very best start. We bridge lonely gaps, nurture new skills, and open up fresh opportunities for learning, play, and friendships.

Driven by the belief that no family should face hard times alone, our work creates the nurturing relationships that help shape healthier, happier futures. Every visit and connection helps build strong, protective bonds, laying the foundations in children's brains for resilience, curiosity, and emotional strength. This support gives children in Southwark and Lewisham the secure start they need to thrive, wherever life takes them.

Cover photo: Callum Toy, used with permission



Our achievements this year are only made possible thanks to the work and dedication of our volunteers, staff, and trustees:

Our 83 wonderful volunteers

Staff:

- Cheryl Rhodes, CEO (to May 2024)
- Becca Jones, CEO (from May 2024), Head of Family Services (to May 2024)
- Yvette Dow, Team Manager – Family Services (from July 2024)
- Klaudia Hajduk, Operations Manager
- Leonardo Greco, Data Coordinator (to April 2024)
- Helen Glanville, Volunteer Coordinator

Family Support Coordinators:

- Mavalyn Bonsu (to June 2024)
- Luciana Schwitzer
- Ola Adegbenro
- Lauren Van Hesteren (from April 2024)
- Tianne Hewitt- Barton (from May 2024)
- Debbie Costi (from June 2024)
- Rosy Bolanos, Family Support Practitioner (to Nov 2024)

Trustees:

- Alex Williams, Chair (to March 2025)
- Tatyana Popova, Chair (from March 2025), Vice Chair (to March 2025)
- Lola Evans, Treasurer (to July 2024, Trustee to March 2025)
- Conchy Velasco, Treasurer (from November 2024, Trustee prior)
- Olu Adeoye
- Alexander Craig (from March 2025)
- Nandika Doble (to Jan 2025)
- Christopher King
- James Lusby
- Claire Moxon
- Rachel Vernazza (to Oct 2024)

Thank you for your care, commitment, and teamwork. You help make good things happen for families in our community every day.

WELCOME

2025 marks 30 years since Home-Start Southwark was established, and we're incredibly proud of what we've achieved.

This year, **we've supported 285 families; our highest number ever**, representing an 85% increase compared to last year. This growth reflects the rising levels of need, poverty, and inequality within the communities we serve, alongside cuts and pressures on other local services. Across Lewisham, our reach has expanded significantly; we're now supporting more than six times as many families as we did in 2021, when our work in the area first began.

We reach families that other services can't, because we take support to people's homes. 74% of the families we support have at least one member with a disability or health condition. For these families, our support is essential in helping them engage with their communities, whether it's attending health appointments, visiting parks, or accessing family hubs. As one parent put it, our help truly **"opened my world."**

In response to parents' concerns about their children's development, we've increased our focus on supporting 2-5 year olds on their journeys to school-readiness through our Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) and Big Hopes Big Futures (BHBF) projects this year. We're truly proud of the difference these initiatives are making, knowing how vital these early years are for a child's future health and growth.

Our volunteers are the driving force that keeps our organisation moving forward and inspires hope and confidence in the families they support. As one parent told us, **"I know I can do it when you've gone, because we did it together."** There is something magical about the change we see through relationships - volunteers standing alongside, and empowering parents and children to know that they can achieve, and tackle life's challenges.

We'd like to give a huge thank you to our 83 amazing family support volunteers, 11 dedicated Board members, and all our generous funders and sponsors - including those who've run races and organised events this year - for their incredible time, passion, and belief in what we do. None of this would be possible without you!

Behind our volunteers is a wonderfully committed and skilled staff team — people who truly understand the challenges of parenting and bring heart, empathy, and experience to everything we do. We're so grateful to everyone involved for their unwavering dedication and hard work.

Every year, more families reach out for our support, and while demand continues to grow, so does our determination to meet it. Over the coming months and years, we want to provide even more families with the help they need to provide brighter futures for their children. Your support is crucial now, more than ever.

Becca Jones - CEO

Tatyana Popova - Chair of Trustees

How we **CHANGE FUTURES**

Every week, our dedicated volunteers visit families in their homes offering a blend of emotional, practical, and playful support to meet each family's unique needs. Visits might involve playing with the children, helping fill out forms, or simply being there to listen. Some parents just need confidence to get out to the park or the library; volunteers make that possible.

“Home-Start made me feel valued. I was never just a mum, I was a human being. In a time when I was reduced to just being a mum by so many I felt seen and appreciated.”

Visits usually last 2–3 hours, with support lasting for 6–12 months. Our volunteers are carefully supervised, and Family Support Coordinators check in throughout. Our holistic approach is all about giving families the tools, confidence and connections needed to thrive, making sure children get the best possible start for the future.

In 2024–25, 83 (including 18 newly trained) volunteers and 5 Family Support Workers supported a total of 255 families and 515 children with our home-visiting service, and an additional 30 families through events.

“We are all coping a lot better. Thanks for your support in the early days, I especially appreciated how realistic you were about expectations and didn't put pressure on me to do things a certain way.”



From isolation to confidence

Leila* was nine months pregnant and living in a hotel with no recourse to public funds, having fled domestic abuse. She felt isolated and low in mood, often only leaving her room for essential appointments.

Following her baby's birth, support began. Some early visits were missed during the winter due to illness, and Leila later described how her low mood had made it hard to engage. Together with her coordinator, she explored what might help her feel better and set achievable goals, visiting a food pantry, spending time in local parks, attending family hubs and a nearby playgroup, and learning ways to budget.

Gradually, Leila's confidence grew. She began going out regularly on her own, focusing on what she could control, and noticing the positive effect that local activities and services were having on both her wellbeing and her baby's development. As support drew to a close, she said how much stronger and more confident she felt, and she proudly described the progress her child was making.

Tailored SUPPORT

In response to the need we see in our community, we offer extra help where it matters most:

Bump to Babe offers support from trained volunteers to new and expectant mums, boosting mental health, bonding, and confidence in early family life. Most parents felt closer to their babies (75%), more confident interacting with them (83%), and more assured in making care decisions (81%). One parent shared, **“I was really struggling after giving birth, and your support came at just the right time, I’m so grateful.”**

Financial Wellbeing support helps families manage their money, with guidance on budgeting, boosting income, and tackling bills, including support with energy costs thanks to SGN funding via Home-Start UK. Parents learned new financial skills (57%), felt more able to manage money (56%), and less stressed about their finances (44%).

Big Hopes Big Future helps children aged two and over, including those with SEND, get ready for nursery and school by building practical and social skills. 72% of children improved language and cognition, and 86% of parents felt more able to encourage their child’s growth. One parent shared, **“My volunteer was amazing, helping us get out, play. Now my son speaks more confidently and seems happier because he can say what he wants.”**

REAL: Raising Early Achievement in Literacy

Through REAL, we provide Southwark families with children aged 2-4 with four home visits, resource bags bursting with books and activity ideas, and a warm invitation to join library trips. Our friendly team encourages play, reading, and conversation, supporting early language and learning, and making every parent feel confident.

- 86% of children have improved their speaking skills.
- 79% show more interest in books.
- 93% of parents feel more confident helping their child learn at home.

This year an additional 30 children attended REAL events exploring literacy in a group setting.

One parent told us, “REAL helped a lot, I think she enjoyed reading books so much. She started to speak more to us in both languages now, lots of words, not so mixed up.” Another mum shared, “It’s brought me and my sons closer and made us do more at home, like reading, which we barely used to do.”

Because of REAL, we’re reaching many more families, giving children the best possible start and helping parents discover the joy of learning together.



The DIFFERENCE we make

In 2024-25, together we helped to change the future for **545 children** across **285 local families** through our support in homes and the community.

These numbers reflect moments when worries eased, smiles grew, and children's foundations for life were set on firmer ground. Each figure on the page stands for a story of care and determination shaping a brighter tomorrow.

This year, parents across Southwark and Lewisham have shown extraordinary resilience, love, and hope in the face of real challenges. Working alongside them, Home-Start Southwark has played a part in building stronger families and healthier beginnings - one conversation, visit, and connection at a time.

We are seeing more families facing multiple challenges, including health and disability, which is why flexible support and swift triage matter so much, especially as prevalence of health problems is high across the families we support in both Southwark (66%) and Lewisham (85%).

Our focus remains firmly on the earliest years, ensuring babies and young children benefit when it counts most, with evidence-based support designed around home learning, secure relationships, and stronger starts in life.

This year, our work has led to remarkable progress. Of the families supported:



improved their parenting skills

with parents feeling more confident in understanding and nurturing their children's development.



increased parental wellbeing

as parents began to feel stronger in their mental and physical health, less isolated, and more hopeful for the future.



of families were less isolated

as they built friendships and found a sense of belonging within their community.



improved parent-child relationships

boosting the nurturing brain-building bonds that are key to healthier, happier futures.



felt better able to keep children safe

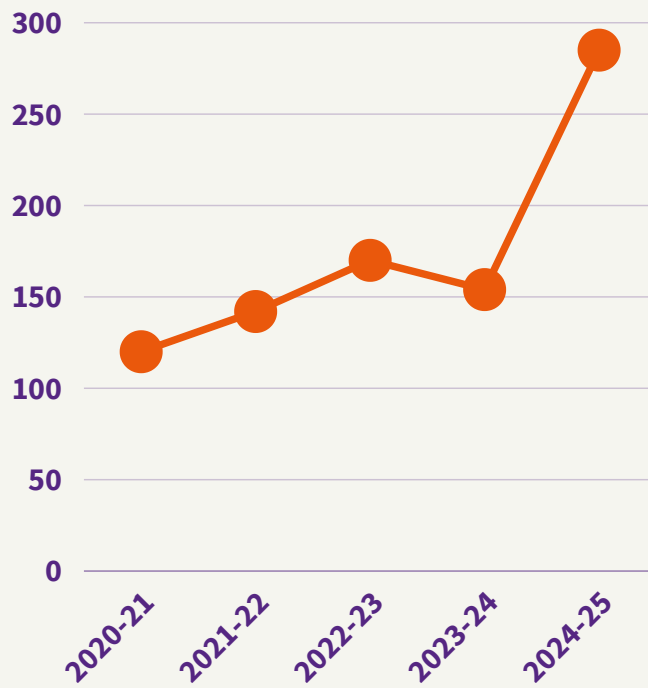
helping little ones feel secure and confident to explore their world and thrive.



felt more able to support their children's physical health

paving the way for more active, healthy family routines and wellbeing.

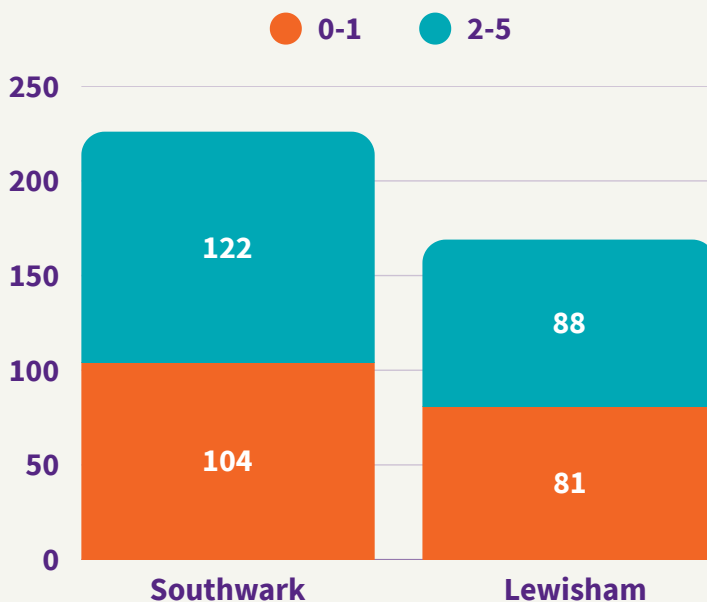
No. of families supported



73% of families supported are from the global majority



0-5 year olds supported this year



Ready for what's next: Growing communication, literacy and confidence

Ayoob and Anim, three-year-old twins with autism and communication delay, joined the REAL programme with their mum Eshe, who wanted fresh ideas to support their learning. Each session was tailored to the boys' interests, using flexible and simple activities that kept them engaged and happy. When some resources didn't fit, the team quickly adapted to follow the children's lead.

Over the course of the programme, both boys made clear progress: their scores on the REAL literacy scale went up by at least one point in every area. Eshe's confidence also grew. She shared that she noticed and celebrated the small steps in her sons' development, and felt much more able to support their learning at home.

The REAL programme gave Eshe practical tools and helped her feel proud, empowered, and better equipped for their future.

THE HEART of Home-Start Southwark

"I have 3 grown daughters and 6 grand children ranging from 11 to 20 years of age. My reason for joining Home-Start about 16 years ago was down to being made redundant from my office role and wanting to give something back to my community.

Being a single parent at the age of 19, I dearly wished that there was someone that I could confide in, who would not judge how I was feeling but reassure me that it was OK to have inner struggles about my parenting as well as feeling lonely.

During my time as a volunteer, I have felt my input was both valued and appreciated by Home-Start and the families I was supporting. I realised that some things I found simple or took for granted were not that easy to my families, such as having a daily rota or routine to help know what needed doing or even pre-cooking part of meal the day before.

I have kept in touch with the majority of my families who often keep me updated as to their progress as well as their children's. I find it very rewarding to see how something I enjoy has had a positive effect on their lives."

Judith, volunteer since 2008

Volunteers are the heart of Home-Start Southwark, equipped with knowledge, empathy, and a genuine passion for making a difference.

Each volunteer brings their own warmth and unique perspective, building relationships with families that are rooted in trust, kindness, and real understanding.

Their support is transformative, helping parents feel seen, valued, and confident as they nurture their children's development.

This year, 83 dedicated volunteers generously shared their time and talents across our community, offering over 9,500 of hours of vital support to families in Southwark and Lewisham.

Our volunteers are local and really know our communities; this year 38% of new volunteers live in Lewisham and 55% live in Southwark. Our volunteers range in age from 21 through to 75. On average our volunteers stay with us for five years! 19% of our volunteers describe themselves as having a disability.



The FUTURE

of Home-Start Southwark

The demand for Home-Start Southwark's support continues to grow, with families facing ever more complex and overlapping challenges, from poverty and poor housing to health, isolation and safeguarding concerns. Our 30th birthday finds us busier than ever, with referrals rising and the local need for individualised, home-based support greater than at any time in our history. Community volunteers remain at the heart of our response, but the challenges families face require careful listening, new skills and ambitious adaptation.

As we look ahead, our plans focus on deepening our impact and reaching even more families in need. We are developing a new five-year strategy, shaped by the voices of families, volunteers and our partners, so we can respond to increasingly complex challenges, from safeguarding to economic hardship, mental health and housing. We aim to embed Equity, Diversity and Inclusion at every level, further strengthen our volunteer support, and secure diverse funding to future-proof our delivery for years to come.

Reflecting our growth and partnership, we will soon be changing our name to Home-Start Southwark & Lewisham, marking our expanded support in both boroughs. As we move forward, we remain dedicated to listening, learning, and adapting so we truly reflect the changing needs of families across south London, ensuring our work continues to make a meaningful, lasting difference.



From overwhelm to empowerment

Rosalia is a single mum living in one of Southwark's most deprived areas, caring for four children in a cramped two-bedroom flat. She found it particularly hard to manage the behaviour of her young son Diego. Diego struggled to communicate, found busy places overwhelming, and had trouble sleeping. Outings felt daunting and added stress at home, so Rosalia often kept the younger children at home

Every day brought exhaustion. Her teenager Sofia was missing out on her own childhood, stepping in to help care for her younger siblings.

Everything changed when Juliet, a Home-Start volunteer, began visiting. With gentle encouragement, Juliet helped Rosalia attend local play sessions, supported Diego's needs, and built Rosalia's confidence. Gradually, trips out felt less daunting, family life became calmer, and Diego started speech therapy after being assessed and diagnosed with autism. This diagnosis brought relief and opened up new support.

Soon Sofia could focus on sixth form and friendships, and Rosalia felt happier, stronger and more in control as a mum. Today, the family are thriving and Rosalia feels much more connected to her community.

THANK YOU

Thank you to everyone who has supported us this year, especially our dedicated volunteers, staff, and trustees. We're so deeply grateful to our funders, whose generosity makes brighter futures possible for children and families.

Our incredible individual supporters:

- Tina Colclough
- Lloyd Davies
- Nan and Michael Doble
- Norman Johnson
- Charlotte and Chris King
- Celia Randell
- Francis Salway
- Sara and Ben Scanlan
- Pippa and Terry South
- Joann Thornton

Community partners:

- Acorn Book Club
- Children's Centres and Family Hubs
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Community Southwark
- Get Rid of and Donate
- Indigo Midwives
- Community Midwifery and Health Visiting
- Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust
- Lewisham Donation Hub
- Lewisham Family Thrive
- Lewisham Local
- Little Village
- Mammakind
- Parent Action
- Shakespeare's Globe Theatre
- South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust
- Social Care and Early Help Teams
- Special Educational Needs Teams
- Speech and Language Therapy Teams

Brilliant businesses:

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- BT
- Canopi
- Dulwich & Sydenham Golf Club
- Easy Fundraising
- John Lewis & Partners
- Marquesado
- MG OMD – Omnicom Media Group (Bankside Office)
- Natasha Colbert
- PwC (More London Office)
- Team Lewis
- Tesco Old Kent Road
- Waitrose London

Generous grant makers:

- Charities Trust
- The Elizabeth & Prince Zaiger Trust
- Family Fund
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- The Haberdashers' Company
- The Henry Smith Foundation
- The Leathersellers
- Lewisham Council
- The Mercers' Company
- Merchant Taylors' Foundation
- National Lottery Community Fund
- Peter Stebbings Memorial Charity
- Robert Holman Memorial Trust
- Southwark Council
- Trusthouse Charitable Foundation
- United St Saviour's Charity

Want to learn more? We'd love to hear from you

Visit: www.homestartsouthwark.org.uk

Call: 0207 737 7720

Email: info@homestartsouthwark.org.uk



Because childhood can't wait

To find out more about Home-Start Southwark and the support we provide, visit
www.homestartsouthwark.org.uk or call 0207 737 7720



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