



HOME START

Reading

Annual Report
2023-24

As we reflect on the last year, we are proud of everyone's efforts to continue our valuable support for young families in need. The staff have worked tirelessly to provide the best service possible, ensuring that every parent has the support they need to give their children the best start in life.

However, this year has not been without its challenges. Our funding situation has presented us with significant hurdles that have tested our resilience and creativity. One of the most difficult issues we faced was when the Children in Need funding ended in June 2023. This multi-year grant had enabled the charity to run our two Family Groups in Whitley and Tilehurst for over 12 years, but sadly our application to extend this funding was rejected at the final stage of the process.

In the absence of alternative funding sources, the trustees had to make an incredibly difficult decision to suspend the Family Groups and prioritise Home Visiting as our core service, alongside other short term projects and courses, which are separately funded. The closure of Family Groups resulted in two staff redundancies, and we said a sad goodbye to Clare Abery and Hannah Taylor at the end of December 2023.

The Big Lottery award for the Improving Mental Health in the Whole Family project with Slough and Bracknell was welcome news and enabled us to re-establish the collaborative work that had previously been developed through this funding stream. We were also delighted to be chosen by The Oratory Prep School as their charity of the year and were even more pleased when the funds they raised were match funded by Microsoft.

Ella's Kitchen has been generous in supporting the charity for almost four years. As this funding is due to end in June 2024, we would like to take this opportunity to thank the company for the huge difference they have made.



CO-CHAIR REPORT

We are now seeking further corporate partnerships (both large and small) and being proactive in exploring new funding avenues and community fundraising events alongside the continuous process of grant applications to local and national funders. While some of our applications have been successful, the competition for limited resources remains fierce.

Despite these challenges we remain optimistic, and we are grateful for every donation, no matter what size, and believe that this collective effort will keep the charity going.

We said goodbye and thank you to trustees Ian Caren, Lottie Pheasant and Chinelo Onyewuchi and wish them well for the future. We were pleased to be joined by Andy Degiorgio and Sally Moore, both co-opted during the year pending formal appointment at the AGM.

We recognise that we need to expand the capacity of our board and develop our succession planning, so we are seeking new trustees with a range of skills. Please get in touch if you are interested.

In 2024 we will celebrate the 40th anniversary of Home-Start Reading. We are looking forward to celebrating everyone's successes and catching up with colleagues and families who have supported or been helped by Home-Start Reading over the years.

We would like to extend our thanks to our wonderful staff team, volunteers, trustees and supporters. Your continued resilience and dedication is the backbone of our charity and together we will keep navigating the challenges and continue to make a positive impact on the lives of families in Reading.



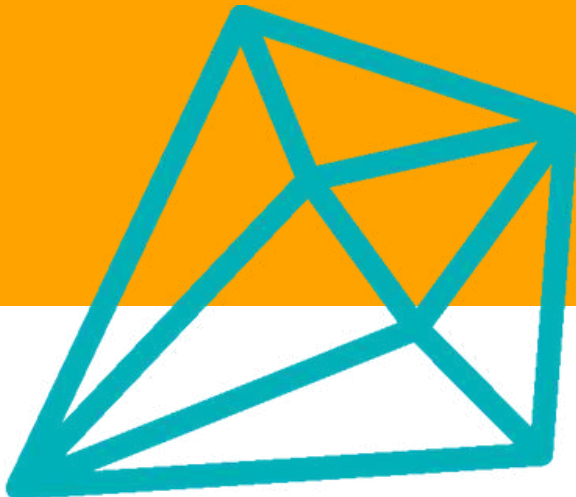
Catherine Troup & Sue Biggs



OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES



OUR STAFF TEAM



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Marion Mortimer
Home Visiting
Coordinator



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Coordinator



Katerina Vlcek-Lambert
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Kathryn McCann
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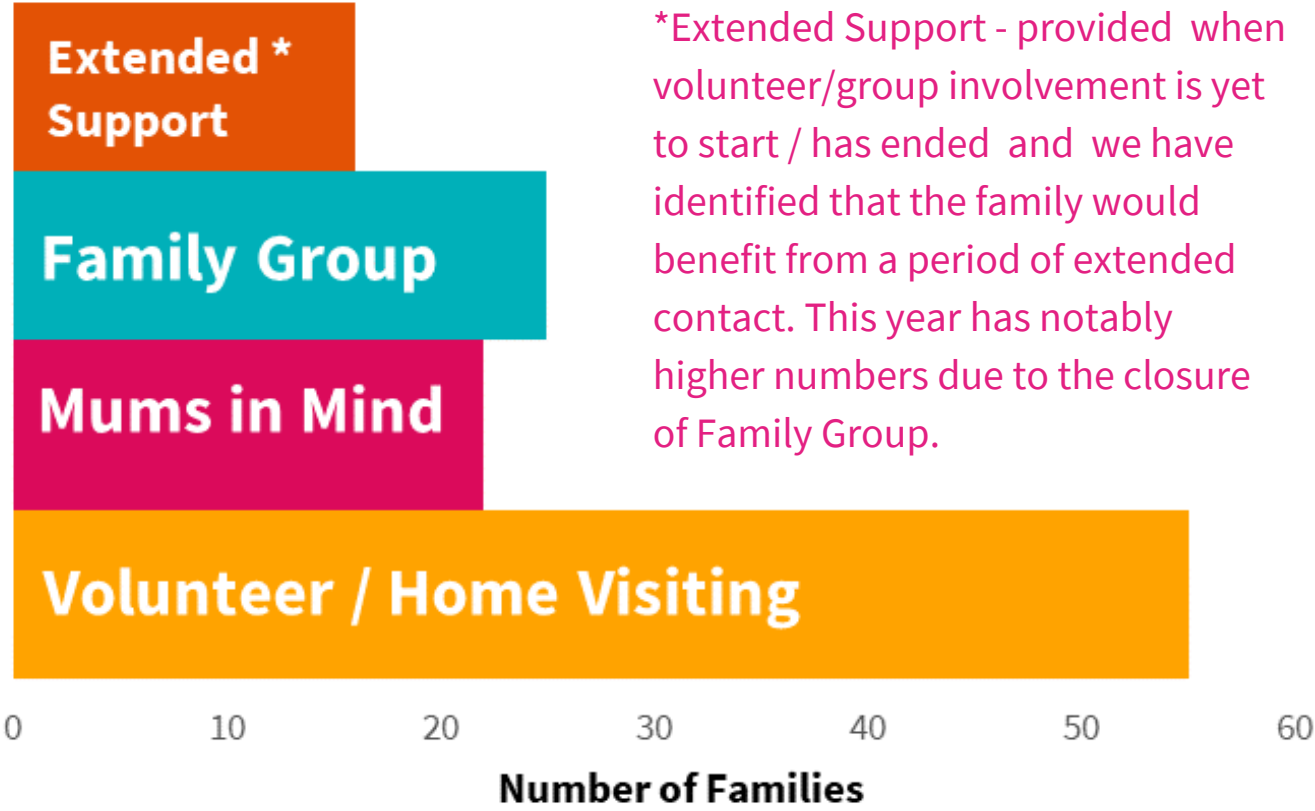
**Our current team as on
1 September 2024**



WHAT WE DO

Services provided

During this year there were four main areas of support offered. Where families have multiple or complex needs, we are able to offer more than one of these services to them. We supported 83 individual families but provided 118 services overall.

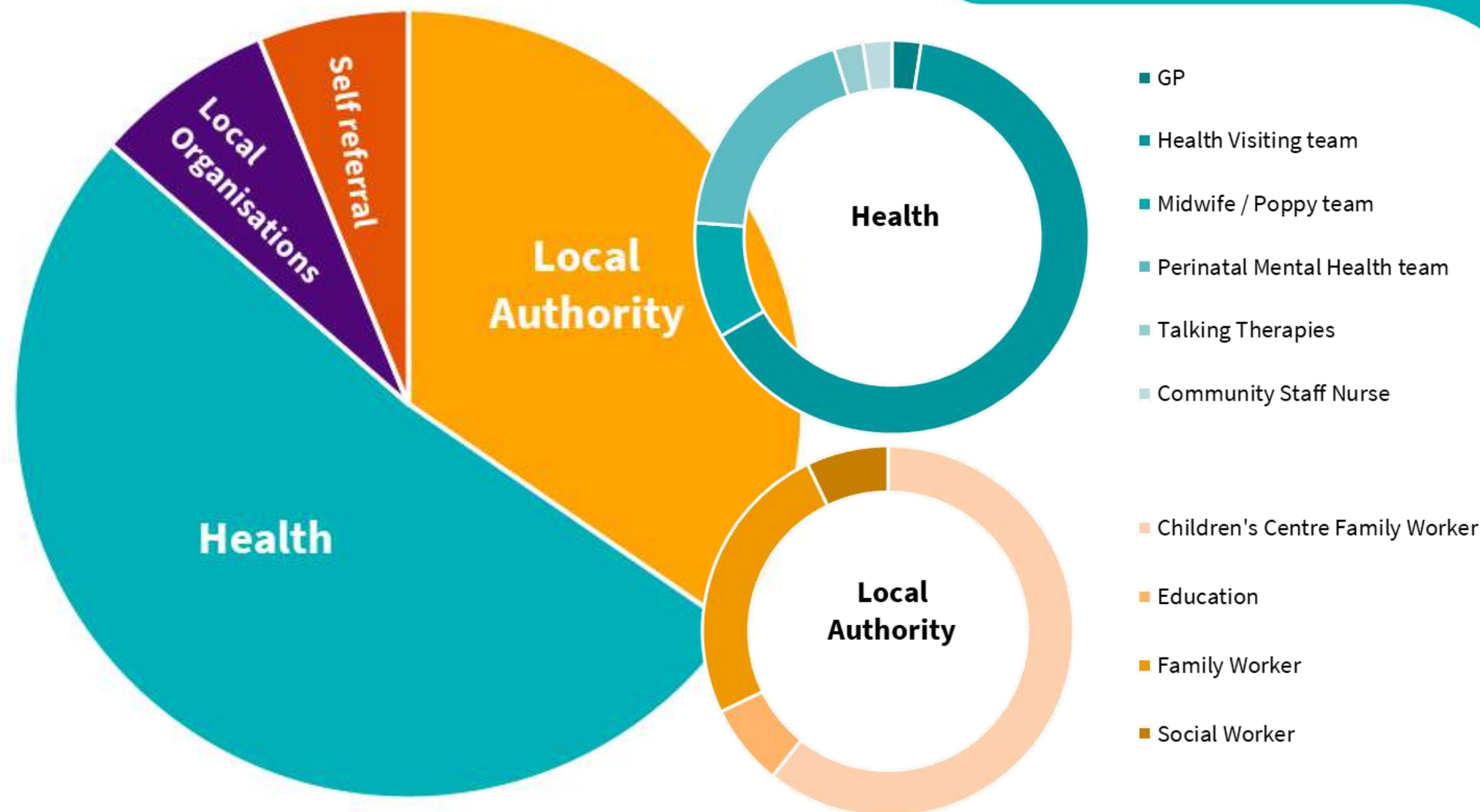


Key stats



WHO REFERS TO US

Broad breakdown of referral agencies



We receive referrals from a number of sources. As expected, referrals this year were highest from health services and the local authority.

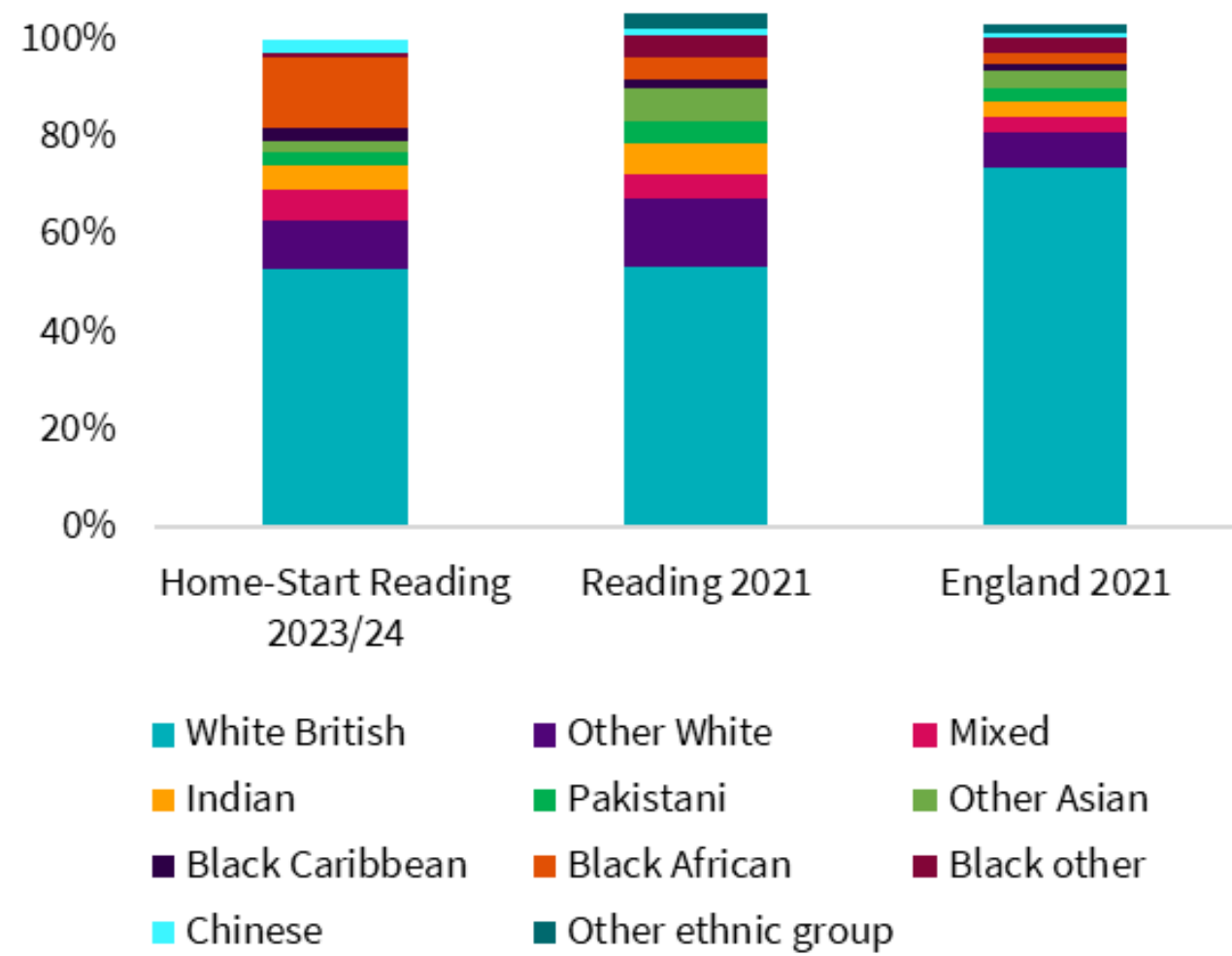
Local organisations that referred to us during this period included other charities and community groups, such as PACT, Berkshire Women’s Aid and Wycliffe Baptist Church.

Thanks so much for such a lovely update and for all your amazing support.

Health Visitor, March 2024

WHO WE HELP

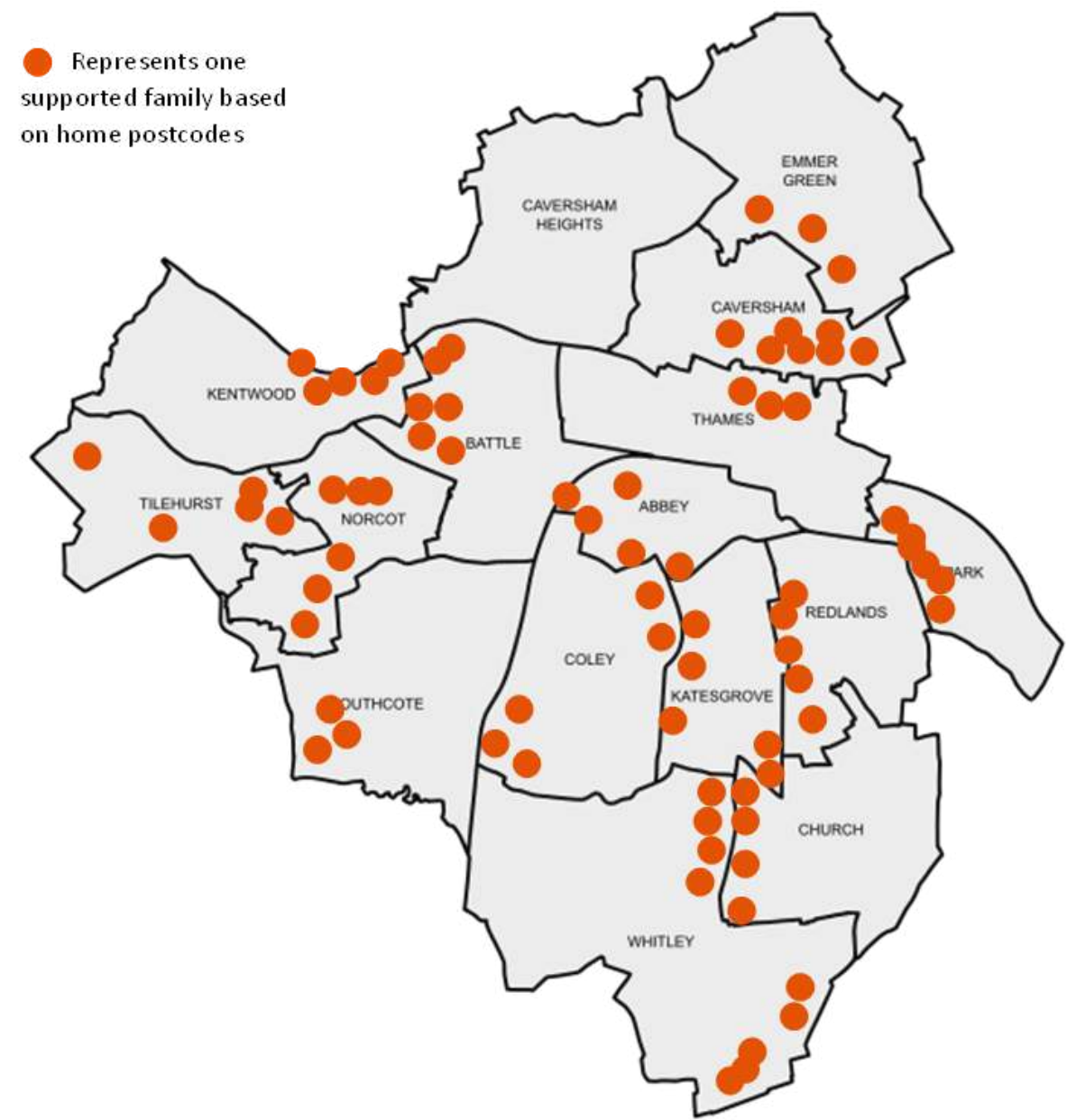
Comparison of ethnicity data across Home-Start Reading, Reading borough and England



The above graph illustrates that the ethnic diversity of supported families continues to reflect the ethnic profile of the Reading area.

Approximately a third of the families we supported had English as their second language which, again, is broadly representative of Reading’s demographics.

Eight out of thirteen wards in Reading contain areas classified as being in the 30% most deprived areas in the UK. Over half of the families we supported live in these areas. A quarter of families live in the three Reading wards that are considered to be in the 10% most deprived in the UK.



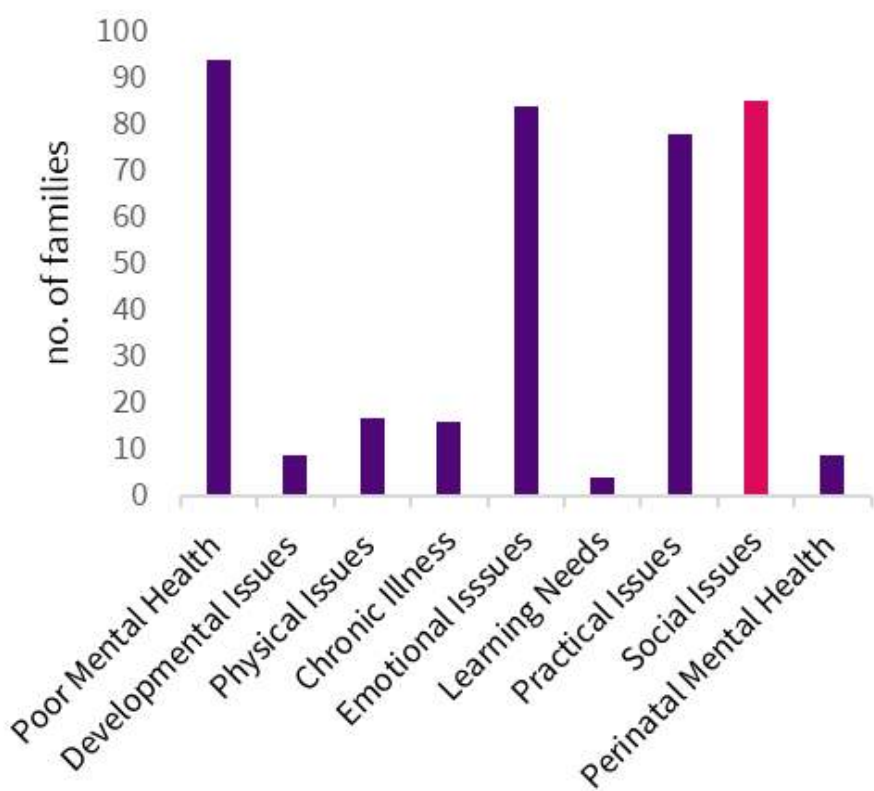
WHY WE DO IT

This year we supported four families where one of the parents was in prison. We worked with six families of refugees or asylum seekers. 40% of the families we supported were living in a single-parent household. 40% were receiving Early Help or Children’s Services (local authority) support, and half of these families had either previously been subject to or were currently under a Child Protection or a Child in Need plan. Based on what we know and what families chose to share with us, 18 families had been affected by domestic abuse.

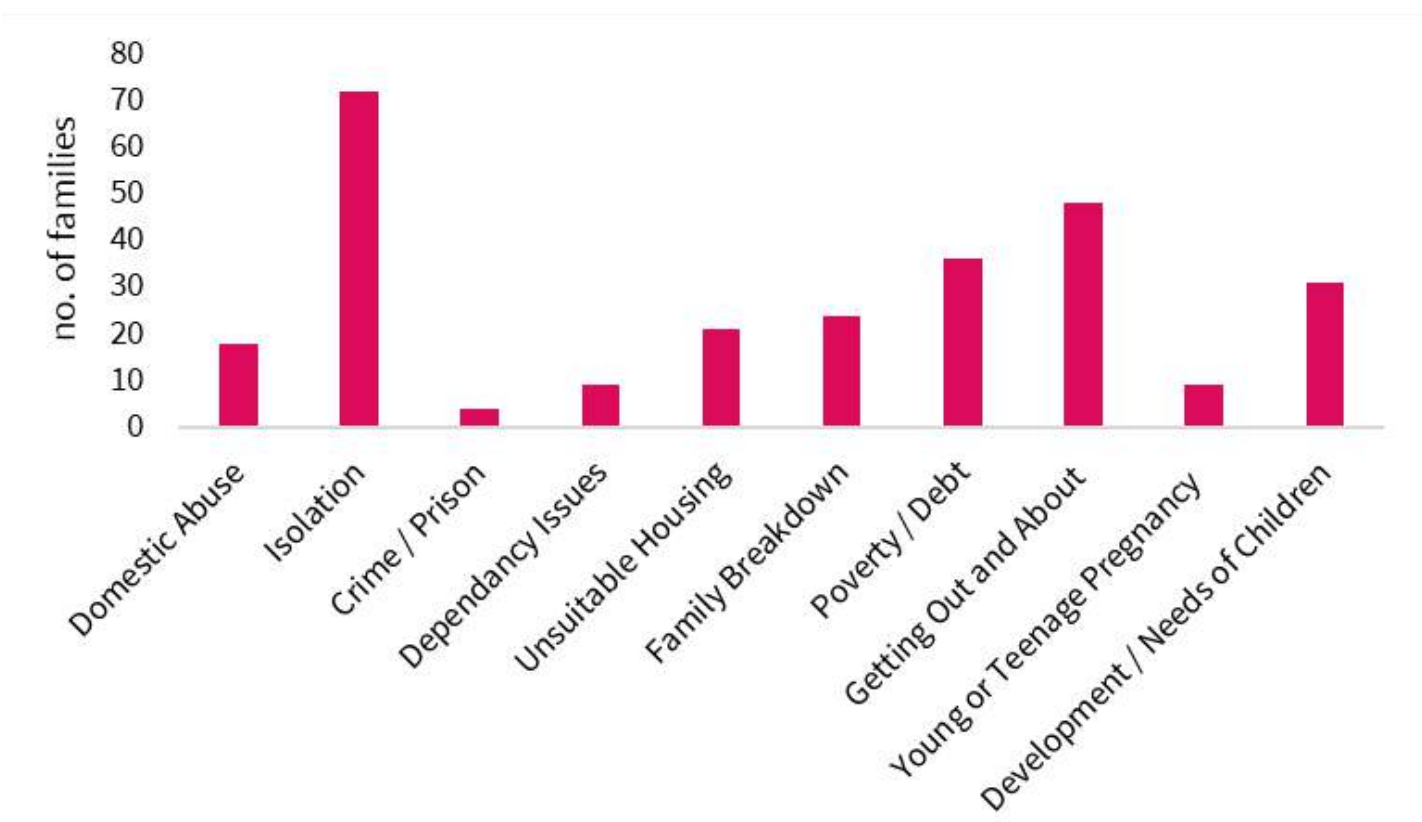
It follows that families often have challenges in more than one area. Each family is unique, with their own set of issues and strengths but there are recurring themes with many of our families that contribute to the cycle of disadvantage.

We know that deprivation and/or being in a position of relative disadvantage is associated with poorer physical and mental health. With the continuation of local, national and global unrest and the cost-of-living crisis, too many families are still facing major obstacles to a safe, healthy and happy life.

Identified issues



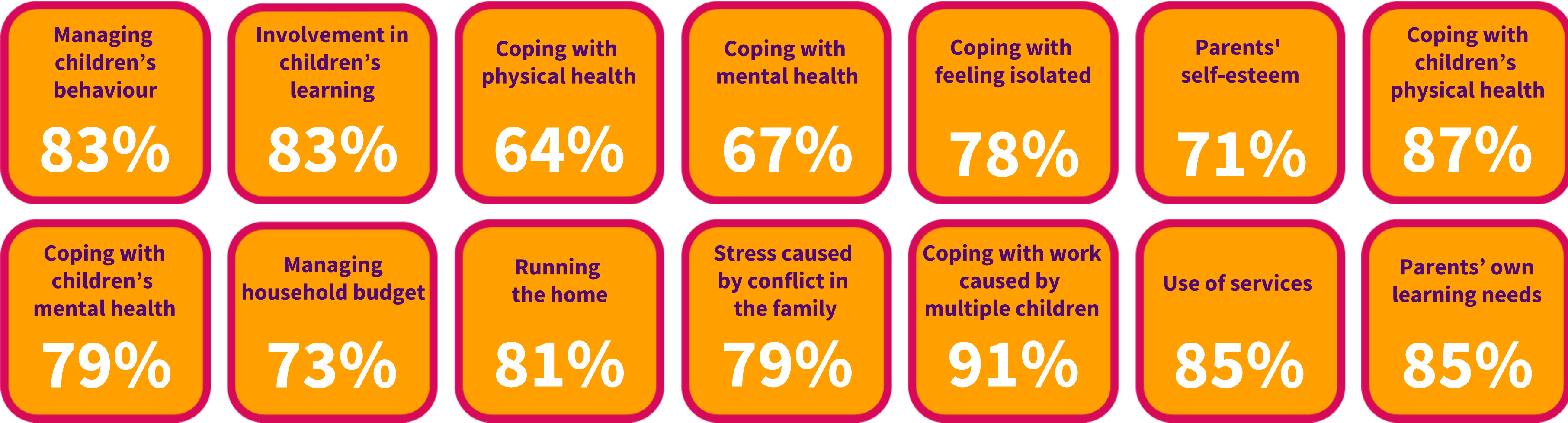
Areas of social issues



OUR IMPACT - THE STATS

We encourage the parents we support to explore areas of family life they are finding difficult as well as to identify their areas of strength.

We use a set of 14 broad areas for parents to self score in terms of coping prior to our support and revisit these areas and review scores during and at the end of their time with us. The nature of family life often means circumstances change and new challenges present themselves. It is not unusual to see these scores fluctuate and the results at the end of support are just a snapshot in time. It does show, however, that overwhelmingly families are able to identify improvements in their day-to-day lives following our involvement.



OUR IMPACT - WHAT THE FAMILIES SAY

The positive impact of our support can also be shown in comments from the families themselves. Their honest and powerful words paint a picture of family life and the part we play in supporting them.

I don't know where you found J from but she is making me into a better person because of her non-judgmental attitude and the way she is. She makes me feel safe and happy.

December 2023

As we don't have visitors, it was really nice to have someone to come into your home. C absolutely loved her - he is always waiting for her, hugging her. I can't believe the difference between the beginning of your support, and now.

June 2023

You offered invaluable support to me and my family through one of the hardest times of my life. I felt alone, trapped and scared. I always tried hard to stay positive and was attending trauma therapy at the time, but had no one to comfort or reassure me that I was doing OK in the days following my sessions. I needed to know I was a good mum despite my struggles and everything would be OK.

Having a volunteer to check in on us every week and discuss any emotions was what got me through my therapy. I wouldn't have done it without her and my life has totally changed now.

November 2023

Honestly I don't think I would have been able to return back to work without the support from your team and from L.

May 2023

At first I couldn't leave the house alone, I was just too stressed. K gave me the tools to literally just get out of the door and I didn't even know I needed that help.

June 2023

My son developed a love of the park because of the volunteer helping us to get out of the flat.

December 2023

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

We ran two volunteer preparation courses, in May and November 2023, and recruited ten new members of the volunteer team.

While they involve important training around supporting and safeguarding families, our courses are so much more than the cascading of information.

The in-person sessions allow our coordinators and potential volunteers to get to know each other and foster a sense of belonging. They are also an opportunity to explore potential issues, manage expectations and consider suitability. They enable attendees to fully understand and appreciate the role they are taking on and how this fits into a much wider picture.

Activities are designed to facilitate self reflection. Potential volunteers are encouraged to use this self-awareness to consider how they would incorporate our ethos and approach to providing support, without compromising their own feelings, emotions or personal values.

This was a great all round course covering all aspects of volunteering – don't change!

I feel more confident and understand more about what's involved.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW VOLUNTEERS

**Karen
Daphne**

**Samantha
Clemencia**

**Tony
Jo**

**Sarah
Hannah**

**Silvina
Tracey**

The course was really good. Friendly, lots of information. Really good activity in the safeguarding.



I feel very well prepared and happy that the co-ordinators will support me. I have gained confidence for the role and understand better how to support families.

HOME VISITING

55 families received home visiting support from us last year. This figure is a slight reduction from the previous annual report but is still an increase over recent years.

Once a successful link is made, families are supported for two hours each week. This support is very much based on what the family feel they need, from practical to emotional help. Our coordinators and volunteers adapt their approach to ensure families are able to engage with the process of change.

The hard work starts before the link is made. We assess risks as well as needs, consider the compatibility of the volunteers available with the family and record scores so there is data available to compare when we close support. Our Case Duration and Exit Strategy is now embedded in our practice, which helps make the most of our volunteer resources to better meet demand.



THANK YOU AND GOODBYE

Marion	Nicola H	Lottie	Ruth	Chris M
Chris D	Joanne	Sara	Linda	Sophie
Meena	Sarah	Arlene	Jackie	Fern
Katy	Nicola P			

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time (over 15 years) volunteering with Home-Start, but now reluctantly feel it's time to step down. I have always felt really supported as a volunteer and knew I could get help if ever I needed it. One thing I've realised is how easy it is to believe only families experiencing poverty need our support, but this is so untrue. Home-Start provides such a valuable service for families.

Retiring volunteer, September 2024

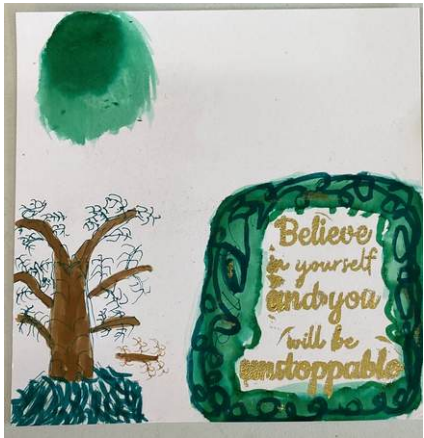
I felt really comfortable with the volunteer around. She was very kind to C and supportive and friendly. Knowing she was coming each week really helped my mental health. I really appreciate the time she spent with us and I loved everything about her. She brought light and smiles to my day. My son was always waiting for the doorbell for her to arrive!

September 2023

I've thought about you and your team and Home-Start as a whole, many times over the last year. I still think it is a wonderful organisation, which has helped many families in the most sympathetic and effective way. I say this to people whenever I get the opportunity. Thank you for sharing your knowledge, your skill and your advice.

Retiring volunteer, September 2024

MUMS IN MIND



We delivered two Mums in Mind courses this year. The September course was funded by Berkshire Community Foundation and the January one was delivered under the recently secured National Lottery funding.

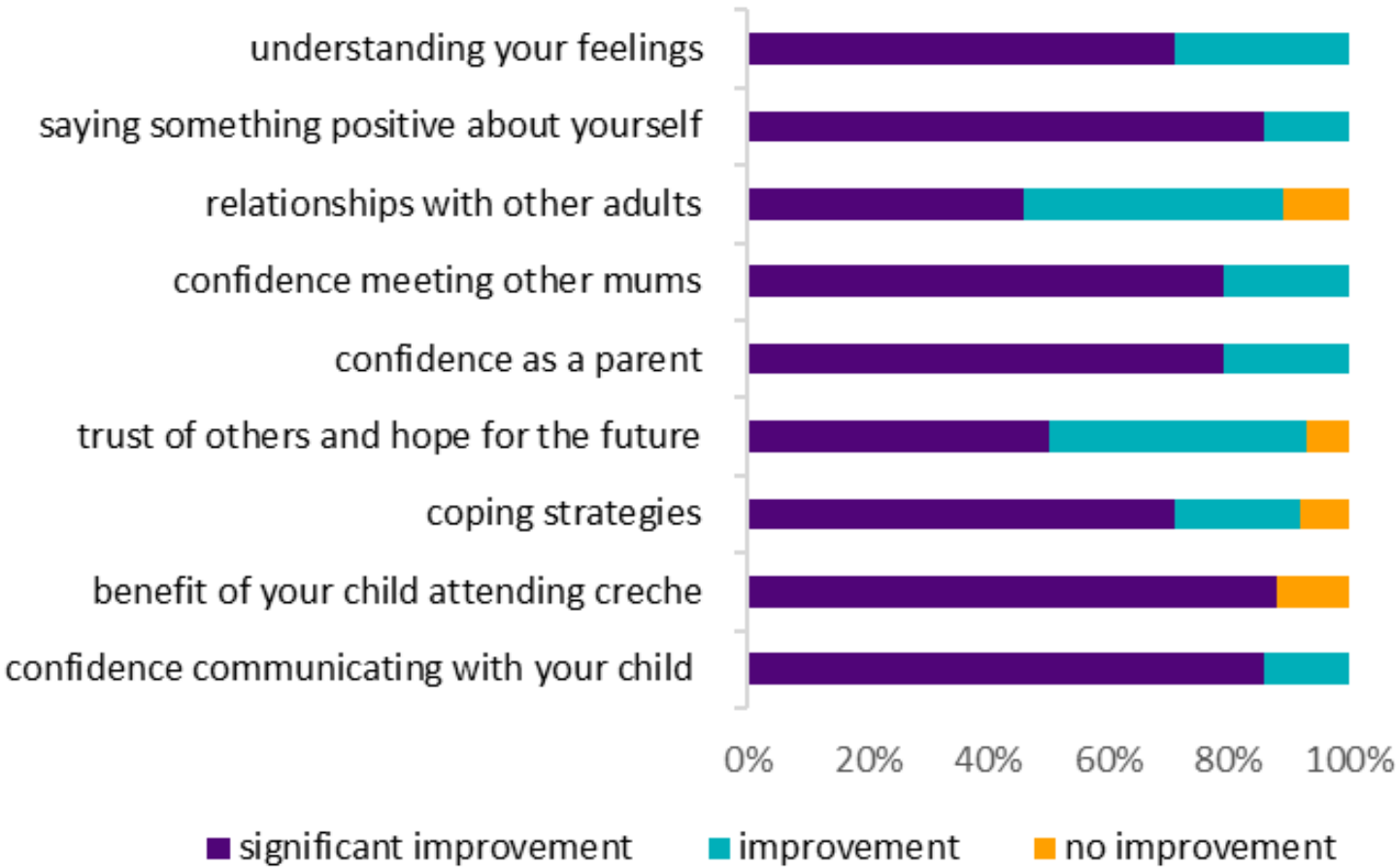
The course combines simple cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and Mellow Parenting techniques, and is presented in a way that is relevant to the challenges of being a mum facing anxiety and depression.

We provide a creche that is flexible to the needs of each mother and allows for free flow between the course and the creche room. This is often the first time mums have left their baby with others.

We run simple craft activities in parallel with the formal learning. We find that mums appreciate the opportunity to focus on an external activity, which allows them more control over how and when they engage with difficult emotional topics. The mums who joined the course were incredibly anxious and all made huge steps to overcome their worries in order to attend. We know that our gentle and individualised approach is key to encouraging people to attend as well as helping them overcome obstacles to their wellbeing.

We continued to facilitate an extension to the course, with six less formal sessions for mums together with their babies, to allow further development of peer support and friendships. With the funding from the National Lottery we plan to evolve this into a more structured ‘baby group’, including sessions with various early years professionals.

The difference it makes



I really enjoyed last week's session, so it was much easier to come along today. Coming to the group today has meant that I have had a good start to my week.

My week has been so, so but I'm here today and Tuesday is now my favourite day of the week.

MUMS IN MIND - WHAT THE MUMS SAY

I will be more aware of the "little things" and celebrate them. I enjoyed the adult company. I feel more confident with how I am as a parent.

I was feeling very nervous at the beginning, but now am feeling very confident doing things like saying my feelings, chatting with other mums.

I loved the routine and how easy going the group is. I felt relaxed and really loved the crafts. Invaluable and so much support. And I have loved being able to relate to other mums.

I enjoyed sitting together, doing activities with other mums. It was good to know how other mums feel – I'm not alone! It was good to get out of the house.

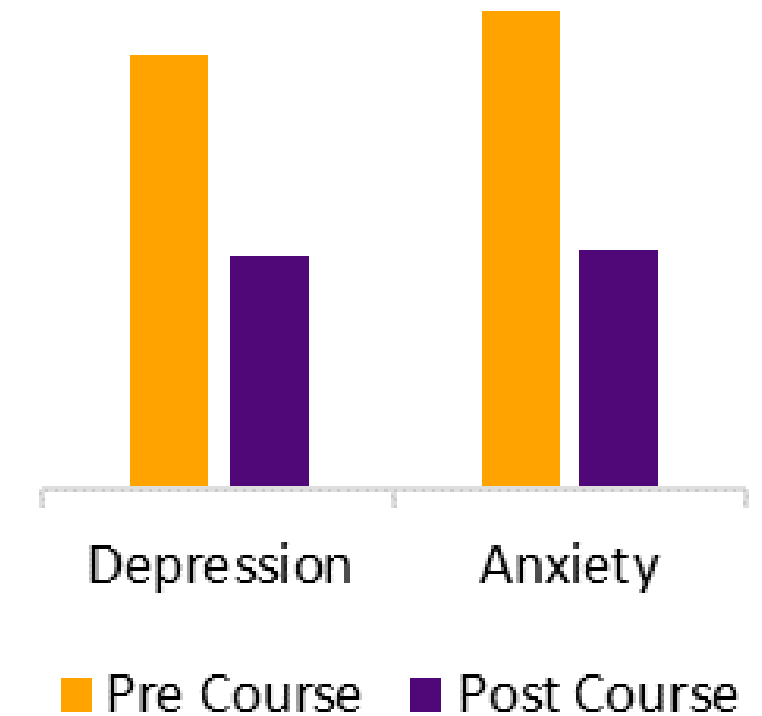
It has allowed me to see that I'm stronger than I thought and I feel less alone.

I enjoyed the safe space in having a voice to speak about my feelings. Having the themed weeks allowed me to focus. I feel more confident and more aware of my feelings about being a mum.

I feel more confident as a mum and understand my feelings more. In the group I was feeling confident and safe enough to be able to talk.

I have learnt to be more patient and speak positive things to my children. I loved meeting other mums and having adult conversations and learning that I'm not alone in my struggles. I feel more positive. I have learnt about how I can increase my self esteem. I have learnt about my habits that may affect my relationship.

You don't talk about the s*** at other baby groups but the honesty and rawness from the other mums has really helped me. I feel more confident. I'm more aware that I have been surviving in flight or fight.



Above is a simple representation of the impact of the course. We use a variety of questions, from clinical screening tools designed to measure levels of depression and generalised anxiety disorder, at the start and end of the course. This allows the mums to have a clearer idea of how they are doing.

We calculated the pre and post scores of the 15 attendees and have presented them as an average to illustrate the general trend of improvement.

FUNDERS

Financial Summary

Key figures 2023-2024

Income	£113,157
Expenditure	£145,192

The shortfall of expenses over income in the year was covered by the use of our reserves.

Our unrestricted reserves at the end of the year are enough to cover six months of running costs. The trustees' target is three to six months.



Fundraising update

We had a smaller cohort of runners for Reading Half Marathon and the Green Park Challenge this year, but, between them, they raised £1,218.65.

We're grateful to Queen Anne's School, Tubman House at Leighton Park School and The Oratory Prep School for raising funds for us during this financial year. Also to Terry Dixon of Terry's Reading Walkabouts who chose us as one of his good causes of the year and raised £2,887.56 for us.

Thanks too to Reading Bach Choir, South Chiltern Choral Society and friends for raising £1,758 for us through carol singing. Microsoft generously agreed to match what we raised through those events as well as the £3,864.18 raised at The Oratory Prep School Christmas Fair.

We're also grateful to business networking group Omni Reading, which has adopted us as its charity, and held a raffle to collect funds for us at their Christmas lunch.



STAFF UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS

Changes to our team

With funding from Children in Need coming to an end last year we had to bring our Family Groups to a close and say a very sad goodbye to our Family Group Coordinator, Claire and Play Leader, Hannah. Home-Start Reading has been providing family groups for over 20 years with Claire at the helm for the last eight of them.

It was incredibly disappointing after such dedication from the Family Group team. We miss them and wish them the very best.



The impact of losing two people from a small team at the end of 2023 was far reaching and required substantial adjustment from the remaining staff. In the New Year we also faced the challenge of long term staff sickness, which further impacted an already reduced workforce.

By the end of this reporting year we were back to full strength and concentrating on moving forward and next steps.

What next?

With 2024 marking our 40th birthday, there is good reason for us to concentrate on and develop our core service. We will also be reflecting on what has changed over the years and how to respond to demand while celebrating the consistent and dependable essence of our unique approach.

The National Lottery has funded a two-year project to recruit a support worker to help us find creative and innovative ways to manage the increasing level of need and the volume and complexity of referrals.

In partnership with Home-Starts Bracknell Forest and Berkshire East we also secured funding from The National Lottery Community Fund that will enable us to deliver a variety of courses and groups in addition to Home Visiting. These will specifically be designed to focus on improving mental health and emotional connections.

We intend to work alongside the board of trustees and within our operational delivery to explore our social and environmental responsibilities and review, develop and/or adopt policies and practice accordingly.

THANK YOUS



We're grateful to all the individuals and organisations that supported us during the year...

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Amazon Europe | Free Cakes for Kids | National Lottery Community Fund | Rotary Club Reading |
| Amy Jennings | Garfield Weston Foundation | Neill Hendry | Rupe Dadd |
| Andy Degiorgio | Hexham Community Centre | Nokia | Sofology |
| Ann Briggs | Home-Start UK | Openreach | St Laurence church |
| Barclays | In memory of Corinne Anne Dishington | Our amazing runners | South Chiltern Choral Society |
| Barry Perkins | Jacqueline Burrage | Patricia Saunders | Sue Boxall |
| Benevity | Jill Lake | PB Nandra | Susannah Randall |
| Berkshire Community Foundation | Jo Rado | Postcode Society Trust | Terry Dixon |
| Charities Trust | John Lewis & Partners, Reading | Project Linus | The Atrium Health Club |
| Chris Dobby | Kate Angwin | Queens Anne's School | The Oracle |
| Circus Starr | Leighton Park Trust | RC Evans | The Oratory Prep School |
| Clemencia Posada-Brown | Liz Brown | RM James | The Salvation Army |
| Connect Reading | Localgiving | Reading Bach Choir | The Weller Centre |
| Cowshed | Mary Wilson (The Small Business Analyst) | Reading Borough Council | Tina Panting (TDP Photography) |
| Don Dobby | Mark Lewthwaite and Sue Biggs | Reading Community Lottery | Turner's Court |
| Drive UK Consulting | Microsoft | Reading Family Aid | Twyford & District Round Table |
| Easy Fundraising | Mobbs Memorial Trust | Reading Station and Network Rail | Waitrose & Partners, Caversham |
| Ella's Kitchen | Moto Foundation | Reading Voluntary Action | YMCA |
| First Days | Mr JE Crosfield | Reading FC Community Trust | |



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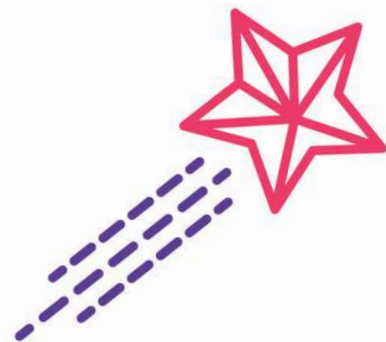
easyfundraising.org.uk



PLAY THE LOCAL LOTTERY -

50% OF WHAT YOU PAY COMES TO US

readingcommunitylottery.co.uk



GET YOUR ORGANISATION INVOLVED

home-start-reading.org.uk/business-support



After a few weeks I felt that R and I built up a good friendship. Initially I was nervous about trusting her, but now we trust her so much - the girls are so excited to see her.

Home-Start support was just what I needed - reliable visits, same time, same day every week. R was so flexible to my needs, and would support me with whatever I needed that week.

The timing of your support was perfect - especially when I was in the depths of depression.

I liked the fact that she would regularly say that she was there to support me. I wish more people knew about Home-Start.

The whole of my wider family think Home-Start is great!

I'm now ready for the support to stop, and for another family to benefit from R's support.

March 2024

Follow us at @HomeStartRDG



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home-start-reading.org.uk



Registered charity 1110638

CONTACT US