



Helping new parents get the best start

Case Study

Executive summary

Home-Start service aims to provide information and support to help parents make informed choices about feeding their baby. Home-Start (Trafford, Salford and Wigan) was commissioned by Family Hubs in Salford.

Working with NHS partners and voluntary, community and faith social enterprises (VCFSEs), an infrastructure was created that allowed for regular dialogue to take place. The volunteers and staff were given the right level of training and access to professional knowledge. They could also tap into established groups that were already providing support to parents in the Salford area.

Breastfeeding contributes to improved health outcomes and a reduction in a broad range of inequalities for babies (including reduced risk of infections, allergies, diabetes, obesity and dental decay) and has been linked to cognitive development and social outcomes. For those who breastfeed there are also benefits including reduced risk of certain cancers, osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease.

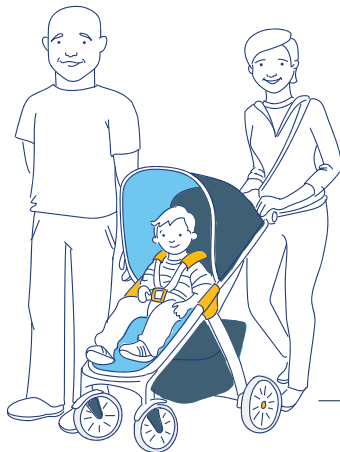
A referral model was established, and 376 contacts were made. The breastfeeding rates at 6-8 weeks are currently 89% in Salford, compared to the national average of 52%.

Timing: May 2024 – March 2025

What did we do?

Home-Start is a charity that was set up to provide support to families during their parenting journey. The service ensures families are regularly visited in their own homes by trained volunteers; all have had experience of parenting and appreciate how hard it can be.

The Home-Start infant feeding peer support service, in Salford, was set up to help parents make informed choices around feeding their baby, and was inspired by what Home-Start HOST (Oldham, Stockport and Tameside) offer in Stockport and Oldham. The Salford service offers support in a combination of different ways; from one-to-one via telephone, home visits, to parent groups and web based social media information pages. This service provides evidence based information to help parents during the first 1000 days (from the antenatal period to 2 years) and beyond.



How did we do it?

Partnership

Developed a partnership and working relationship with midwives and health professionals to access contact details of new parents. This involved working with the Salford Transformation Midwife and Salford Infant Feeding Lead as well as building relationships with Infant Feeding Leads across **5 hospitals & 3 trusts.**

Peer support

We set up peer support drop-ins within family hubs/parent and baby groups.

Training

Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) accredited training was provided via the NCT (National Childbirth Trust) to ensure all staff and volunteers were trained to meet [UNICEF BFI](#) standards.

Community engagement

Worked with VCFSEs within the community to access existing groups such as Boobs (Be Open on Breastfeeding Salford) to try to link up activities and support for parents in Salford. The reach was extended across the Family Hubs in Salford as well as Gateways and libraries, leisure centres, housing associations and other community venues to increase accessibility.



What did we find?

68%

of parents in the Salford area indicated that they felt they would have benefited further from having the support earlier.

Inclusivity is important to extend the reach of the service. To continually review the service and strive to shape the offer around the needs of the different communities within Salford.

A direct correlation, early access to support contributes to increased breastfeeding rates.

Once parents enter and engage in support, breastfeeding rates at **6-8 weeks** are at **89%** compared to Salford's rate of **55%** and the national rate of **52%**.

The breastfeeding peer support service is an integral part of the current health model within the NHS due to current gaps in postnatal support for parents. They offer more than a peer support service having qualified and experienced breastfeeding counsellors as part of the staff team.

Feedback from service users

"The team have been so supportive during my breastfeeding journey, they really supported when I was experiencing pain and positioning difficulties. I don't think I would still be exclusively breastfeeding at nearly 4 months if it wasn't for the support received."

"...the advice I received was timely and to the point, which meant I could immediately implement it and saw the difference. Thanks so much, Jo & the team!"

"I'm grateful for this support group and the fact that you guys are here to help so many new mums like me. Thank you Rhianwyn, I'll forever be thankful to you. You're doing a great job, and I wish you all the best"



Key challenges & lessons learned

Data sharing

The ambition is for all parents to be contacted within **48 hours post-birth**, but unfortunately there have been challenges getting the data sharing agreement in place between Home-Start and the NHS trust, though conversations are continuing to try to get this in place.

Referrals are key

The service is reliant on **referrals** via professional or self-referral (to see details of how to refer see blue box below). This has severely impacted the reach to all new parents in Salford and therefore the ability to provide new parents with the tools to make informed decisions about feeding their babies.

Stakeholder relationships

Investing time is important, but it requires significant effort to build and maintain.

Funding of service and planning

Funding is currently secured to December 2026. A lack of continuation funding risks undermining programme stability, with short-term investments making staff retention and morale more difficult to sustain. This uncertainty limits the ability to plan strategically and may compromise the quality and consistency of service delivery.

Staff resourcing

The service will need to be flexible to possible hospital discharge pathways. This may impact on breastfeeding recorded rates at 6-8 weeks.



Volunteer recruitment and retention

Recruiting volunteers from across the community is vital for creating an inclusive service with broad reach. 19 volunteers have been successfully recruited and trained to date. This is a big commitment, as the training alone requires 30 hours of volunteer time.

Although support groups are ideally run by volunteers, staff continue to step in when needed to ensure consistency and quality of service. This does occasionally reduce the time available for support calls and home visits, but it also highlights the strength of the team's commitment to maintaining safe, reliable support.

Like many volunteer-led services, we recognise that retention requires ongoing attention. We are continuing to focus on being flexible, supportive, and proactive in growing our volunteer base. These efforts are helping us build a resilient and well-supported volunteer community for the long term.

Support group attendance

Newly formed meetup groups tend to have low attendance. On going work is needed to promote these groups as they become more established.

Training need identified

There are examples of some health care staff providing poor advice that led to the unnecessary introduction of infant formula in the first few days reducing parents confidence in breastfeeding and reducing breastmilk supply. There is a need for all professionals to be aware of evidenced-based information and signposting to community support in relation to infant feeding.

In Greater Manchester, professionals are encouraged to access training and should contact their management for details of local training details of face to face or online options such as [e-learning](#) for health.



For details of how to refer to the Home-Start Infant Feeding Peer Support Service please view their [website](#).

If you want to know more about Home-Start please view the [Home-Start website](#).

Click here to watch [Beth's story](#) and [Sarah's story](#).

If you have any questions about this story of change please email gmhscp.adminpopulationhealth@nhs.net.