

Home-Start Kernow

An external evaluation of Year 2 of Home-Start Kernow's Big Lottery Fund project to support families in Cornwall.



Home-Start Kernow | External Evaluation

Steve Allman | November 2016



Contents

Introduction	3
About the Project	3
The Challenges Facing Cornish Families	4
About The Evaluation	5
Impact of Big Lottery Fund Outcomes	6
Project Reach (including map)	8
How Families Access Home-Start Kernow	9
Why Families Access Home-Start Kernow	10
Feedback from Families in Year 2	11
Feedback from Volunteers in Year 2	13
Feedback from External Stakeholders in Year 2	16
Challenges	19
Recommendations	19
Acknowledgements	20

Introduction

Home-Start Kernow recognises that being a parent, whatever your situation, can be difficult at times, especially when children are young.

From its base in Redruth, South West Cornwall, the charity offers support, friendship and practical help to parents with a child under five across the county. Some parents feel exhausted and overwhelmed by the stresses of family life. Others struggle to overcome additional challenges, including post-natal depression, illness, disability, social isolation or multiple births.

Home-Start Kernow helps parents by matching them with a carefully selected volunteer who must undergo an extensive six-week training programme before visiting the family in their own home to provide emotional and practical support for as long as parents require it. Often referred to as “home-visiting”, this simple model of support can provide preventative input at critical flash-points in a parent's life which can significantly reduce the need to receive long-term support from statutory services and other agencies.

Despite being the only Home-Start scheme in the whole of Cornwall (other counties tend to have multiple schemes) the charity faced closure in 2014 following sweeping cuts to health and social care funding, but received a grant of £390,197 from the Big Lottery Fund, enabling a fresh start.

This external evaluation reports on the achievements and impact of Home-Start Kernow during the second year of the Big Lottery Fund project.

About the Project

Home-Start Kernow designed the Big Lottery Fund project in direct response to the range of needs identified by local families.

Trustees and staff recognised that, without Home-Start Kernow, the largest gap in local services would be their core offer of home-visiting support, which sees local people with parenting experience recruited and trained as volunteers before being matched with local families to support their needs.

These needs may range from a mum experiencing post-natal depression after the birth of her baby and becoming withdrawn and isolated to a parent struggling to cope with a bereavement or a relationship breakdown. The charity has agreed milestones with the Big Lottery Fund over three years until 2017, broadly structured under four core outcomes as follows:

- 1. Families with young children develop increased confidence, self esteem and improve parenting skills.**
- 2. Families with young children will become less isolated.**
- 3. Families make a measurable improvement in identified needs leading to an improvement in family well being.**
- 4. Families have increased access to local services leading to a wider support network.**

The Challenges Facing Cornish Families

Millions of families flock to Cornwall each year to enjoy the county's miles of sandy beaches and spend some quality time together on holiday.

They might be surprised to learn that, just a short distance from the roar of the ocean, the ice cream parlours and the surf shops, some local families are struggling to cope with a range of challenges including social and rural isolation, mental health issues, disability and low income and unemployment.

Cornwall is England's poorest county (1). If it was a country it would be poorer than Lithuania and Hungary (2). 17 areas in Cornwall are amongst the 10% most deprived in the UK including Redruth, the former mining town where Home-Start is based (3). In December 2015, for example, over two thousand people used the local Food Bank in Redruth to support themselves and their families (2).

The Campaign to End Child Poverty estimates that the child poverty rate in Penzance, for example, is 41%; a rate which puts Penzance on par with parts of inner London and is 16% higher than the national average. Levels of child poverty are expected to rise by 50% in the UK to nearly 26% by 2021 (5).

These challenges come as no surprise to Home-Start Kernow; the charity continues to support families in Cornwall to give their children the best start in life against a backdrop of ever-reducing funding and resources. Between 2009 and 2015, Cornwall County Council cut the annual children's services

budget by 17% from £105 million to £87 million and plans to reduce it by a further 31% (£27 million) by 2019 (3).

The sharp drop in funding and resources is not in any way matched by the level of need for Home-Start support, which continues to rise substantially.

The number of families referred to Home-Start Kernow in 2016 has increased by 75% in just one year. A little under half of these families (49%) are referred by statutory sources, although the charity is not in receipt of statutory funds.

Home-Start Kernow is in an unusual position as it is the only Home-Start scheme in the whole of Cornwall. Most other counties have multiple schemes; neighbouring Devon, for example, has four schemes. Lincolnshire, which also features on the list of poorest English counties, had eight schemes which merged in 2016 to form one large scheme covering the whole county.

Home-Start Kernow acknowledges the significant challenges faced by families in Cornwall and would like to develop a comprehensive service across the whole of the county. However, the charity is limited by the currently level of resources which, compared with other areas, are significantly less in a county where the level of need is significantly more.

- 1) [Eurostat, 2014](#)
- 2) [New Statesman, February 2016](#)
- 3) [The Guardian, August 2016](#)
- 4) [End Child Poverty, October 2014](#)
- 5) [Child Poverty Action Group, March 2016](#)

About the Evaluation

This our second evaluation of Home-Start Kernow, the first having taken place in 2015 at the end of the first year of Big Lottery Fund support.

Recognising the importance of evaluating and learning from the project, Home-Start Kernow designed a tender process to appoint an evaluator for the duration of the Big Lottery Fund grant over three years and selected Steve Allman, an independent evaluator with significant experience of evaluating Big Lottery Fund projects and Home-Start projects, in particular.

The evaluator is in contact with Home-Start Kernow all year round and meets with staff and trustees at regular intervals to evaluate progress and impact. This Year Two report identifies impact thus far, highlights good practice and identifies potential areas for improvement and potential opportunities; based on our findings from data provided by Home-Start and other stakeholders.

Families, volunteers, staff, trustees and external stakeholders, including funders and referrers, have all had opportunities to contribute to the evaluation throughout the year with their feedback enabling Home-Start Kernow to address some of the key questions the charity posed to itself at the start of the project including; whether home-visiting support improves identified needs, whether families and others are satisfied with the service provided by Home-Start Kernow and what the local gaps in services are.

Home-Start Kernow is fully committed to using the external evaluation as a tool for continuous improvement and development of its offer to families.

Methodology

Home-Start Kernow set out their preferred methodology with a particular emphasis on engaging key stakeholders in the evaluation, primarily families and external partners. The requirements of the evaluation are to conduct satisfaction surveys each year and to present the findings in a final report.

The charity also proposed 5 structured feedback meetings with staff and trustees throughout the project to assist in evaluating and developing the service. These have continued throughout the second year of the project, with the next review scheduled for November 2016, at the start of Year 3.

In consultation with the external evaluator, the original methodology was adjusted to incorporate additional feedback from volunteers and to include an additional round of engagement with key stakeholders in Year Two.

During summer 2016, towards the end of Year Two, the evaluator engaged 21 contactable families provided by Home-Start Kernow, which sought permission to share their contact details with the evaluator. The primary method of engagement was via telephone interview (16) and online surveys (5). 34 volunteers responded to an online survey, a 62% improvement on the response rate in Year 1, and 12 external partners completed an online survey.

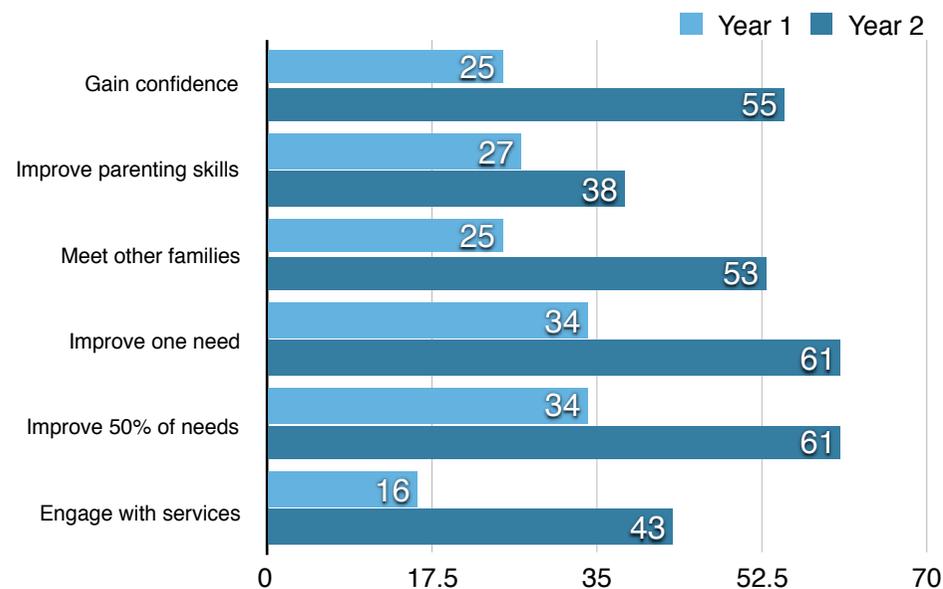
Furthermore, Home-Start Kernow has submitted documents for evaluation, including statistics from MESH, Home-Start's bespoke database, Big Lottery Fund reports and minutes from Board meetings throughout the year.

Impact of Big Lottery Fund Outcomes

Our overarching headline is that Home-Start Kernow’s impact on local families has increased significantly since our previous evaluation in Year 1.

The theme for our previous report in 2015 was very much “bouncing back” as Home-Start Kernow worked hard to re-establish itself after near-closure, whilst still delivering the outcomes agreed with the Big Lottery Fund. There is still a way to go and Home-Start faces the same challenges as other charities, but the theme for Year 2 is very much one of sustained progress.

90 families were supported by Home-Start Kernow by the end of Year 2, a 100% increase on the number supported in Year 1. The chart below shows significant gains in the numbers of families supported under **every** outcome:



Outcome 1: Families with young children develop increased confidence and self esteem and improved parenting skills.

55 families have gained the confidence to engage in new activities, exceeding the Year 2 target for this outcome (45) by some 22% and improving on the same outcome in Year 1 by some 120%.

38 of 46 identified families report improved parenting skills.

82 families report improved confidence since the project began.

53 families report improved parenting skills since the project began.

Outcome 2: Families with young children will become less isolated.

53 families in Year 2 established contact with other families with children, over-achieving the Year Two target for this outcome by 112%.

78 families have met other families since the project began.

Outcome 3: Families make a measurable improvement in identified needs leading to an improvement in family well being.

68% of families improved at least one identified area of need (61 families).

98% of families report improvement in 50% of areas of need (59 families).

95 families report an improvement in one need since the project began.

89 families report improvement in 50% of needs since the project began.

Outcome 4: Families have increased access to local services leading to a wider support network.

93% of identified families (43 families) increased their use of local services, over achieving this indicator by some 43% and improving on the same outcome in Year 1 by some 168%.

59 families have accessed new services since the project began.

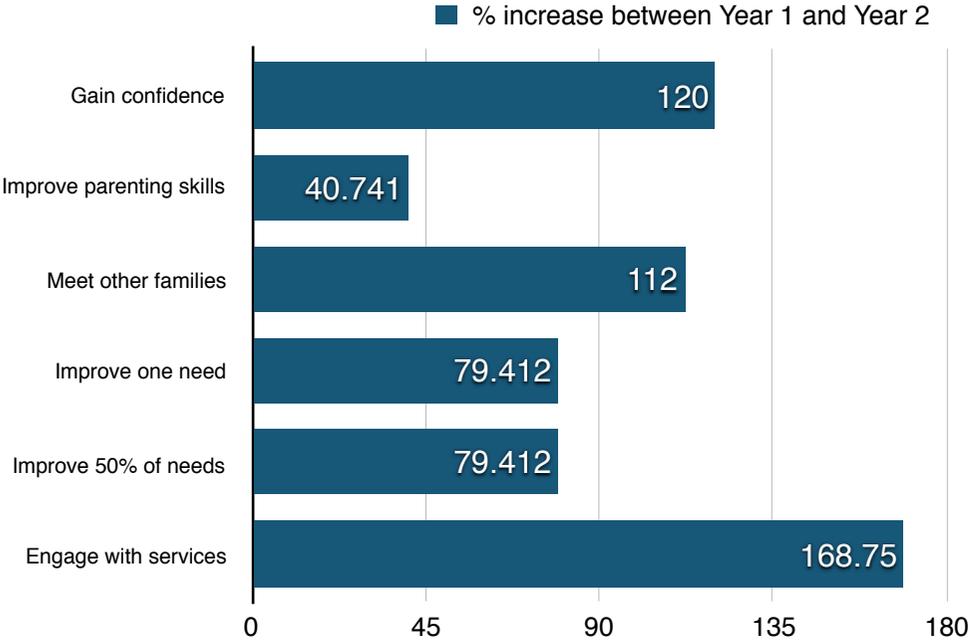
Impact Increased Significantly During Year Two

Our evaluation in Year Two finds that Home-Start Kernow has made significant strides in increasing the number of families supported under each of the Big Lottery Fund outcomes when compared with our Year 1 findings.

We believe this achievement is the result of a number of contributing factors:

- Increased numbers of families being referred to the charity
- Increased staff hours during Year 2, particularly coordinator hours.
- Successful volunteer recruitment drives in key areas during Year Two.
- Increased marketing activity and increased use of online social media.

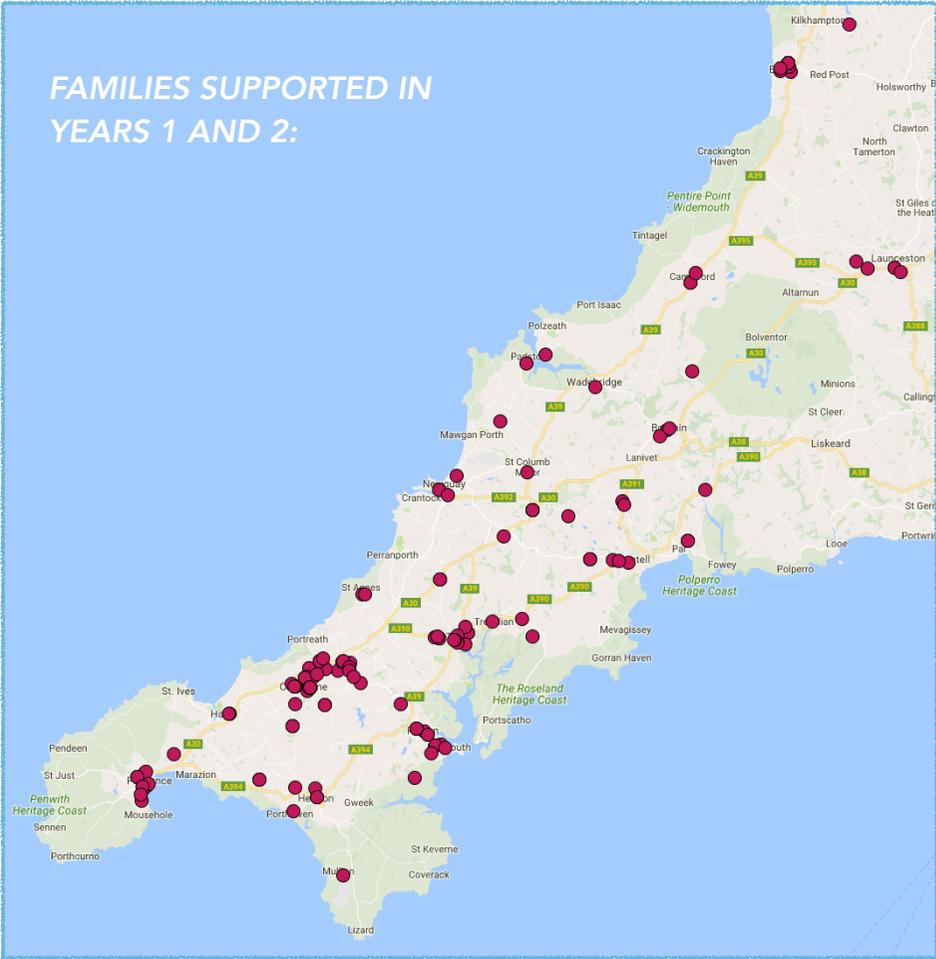
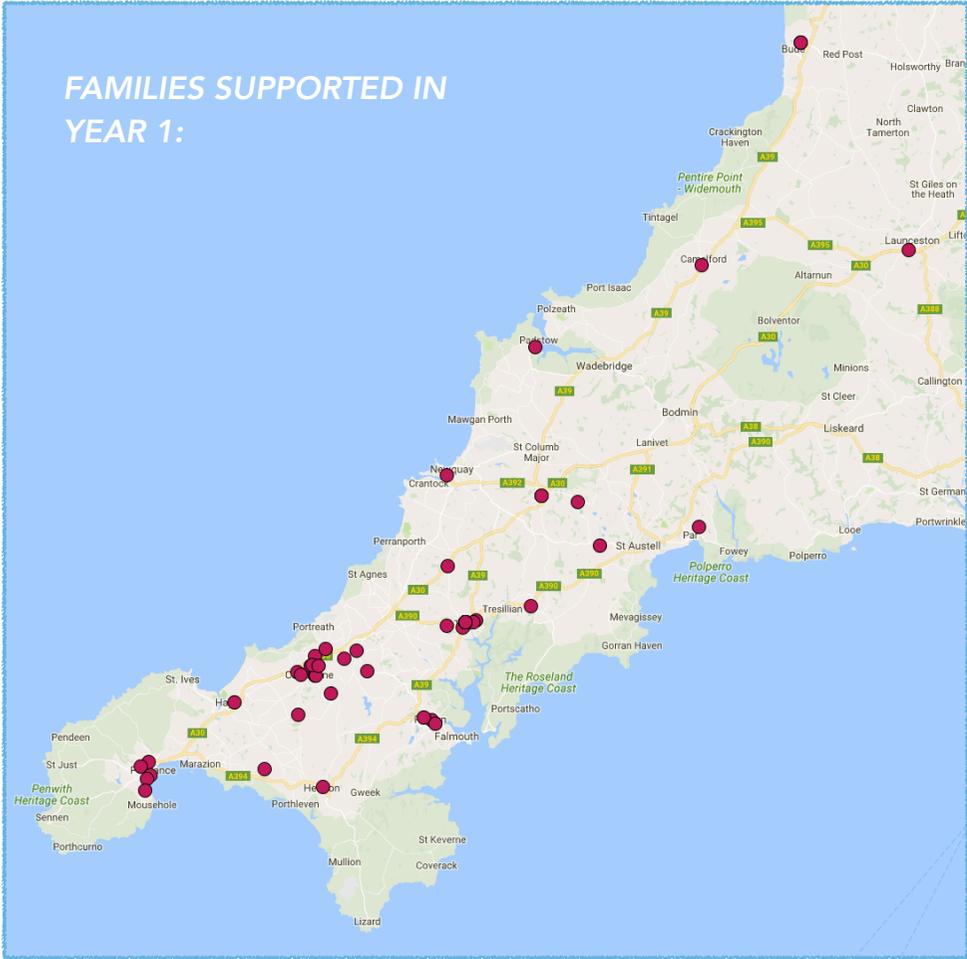
THE CHART BELOW SHOWS THAT THE NUMBER OF FAMILIES SUPPORTED UNDER EVERY BIG LOTTERY FUND OUTCOME INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY IN YEAR 2:



Project Reach

The maps below shows the 109% growth in families supported in Years 1 and 2, with Home-Start Kernow making particular progress to extend the service into Northern and Eastern parts of Cornwall during 2015-16.

To get a sense of the rurality of Cornwall, note there are approximately 80 miles and a 2 hour drive between families supported at the most Northerly point (Kilkhampton) and the most Southerly point (Mullion).



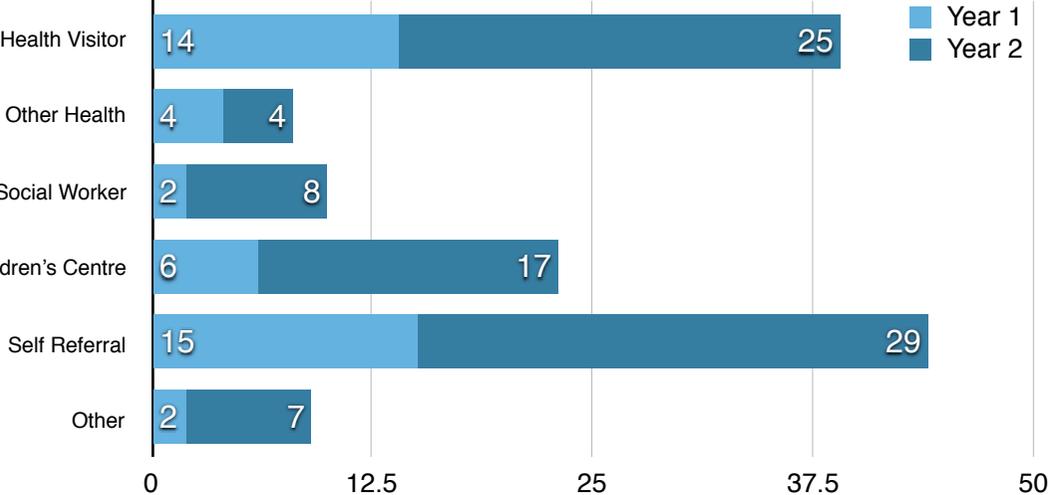
How Families Access Home-Start

The number of families referred to Home-Start Kernow increased dramatically during Year 2 by some 75% to 110.

The charity's records indicate that 49% of families were referred by statutory partners in Year 2, with the majority being referred by Health Visitors (25) followed by Children's Centres (17) and the increase in statutory referrals looks set to continue in Year 3.

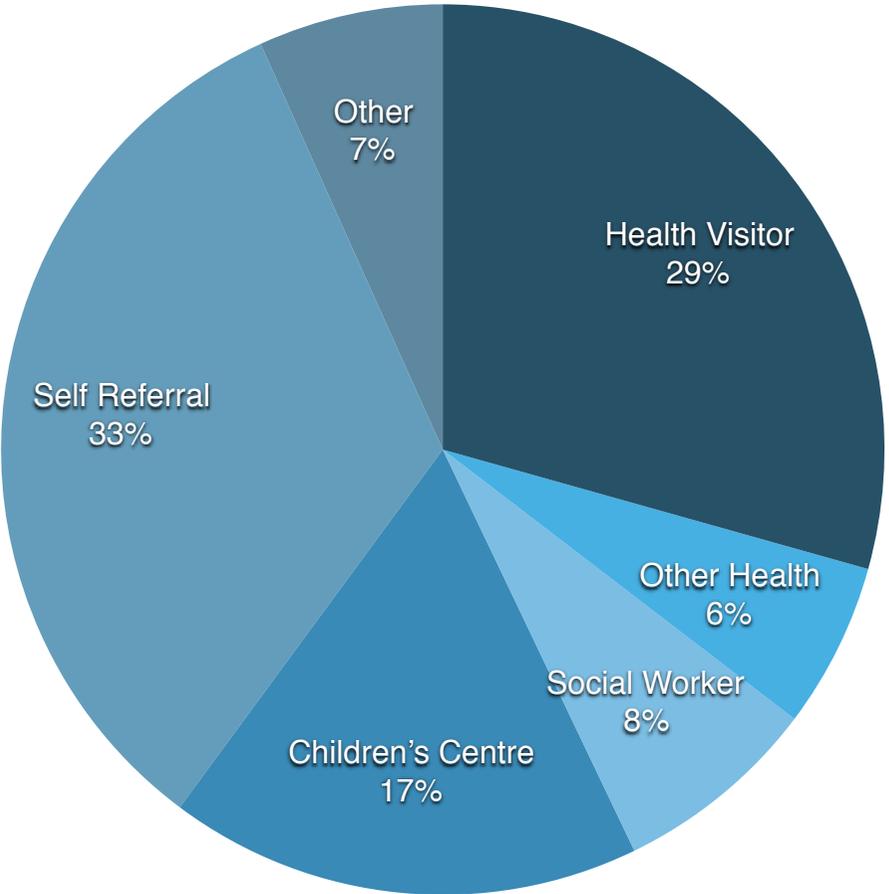
Encouragingly, 29 families referred themselves to the charity during Year 2, an increase of 93% on self-referrals in Year 1.

BELOW: THE CHART SHOWS THAT REFERRALS FROM FIVE OUT OF SIX REFERRAL SOURCES HAVE INCREASED SUBSTANTIALLY IN YEAR 2.



Steve Allman | November 2016

BELOW: THE CHART SHOWS THE PROPORTION OF REFERRALS FROM EACH SOURCE DURING YEARS 1 AND 2.

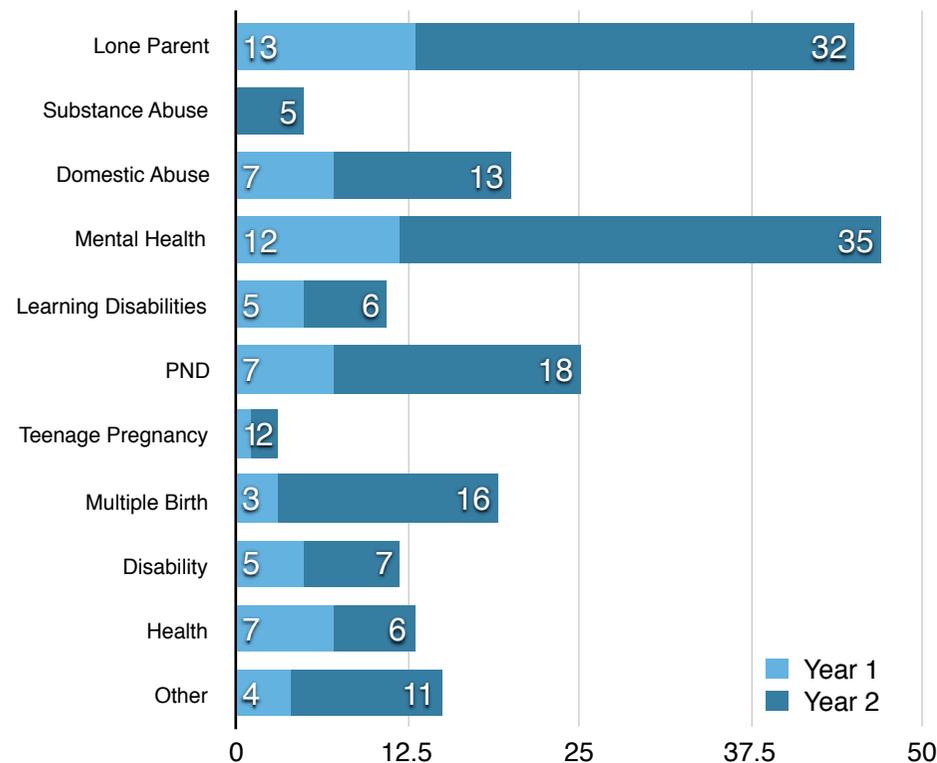


Why Families Access Home-Start

Home-Start records the reasons why families are referred to the charity at the point of referral and data from Year 2 points to significant increases in all areas of need, with the exception of a minor decline in health referrals.

Mental health and lone parenting are the most prevalent reasons for referral, both in Year 2 and overall, followed by post-natal depression, multiple birth and domestic abuse.

BELOW: THE CHART SHOWS REASONS FOR REFERRAL IN YEARS 1 AND 2, TOGETHER WITH THE CUMULATIVE TOTAL ACROSS BOTH YEARS



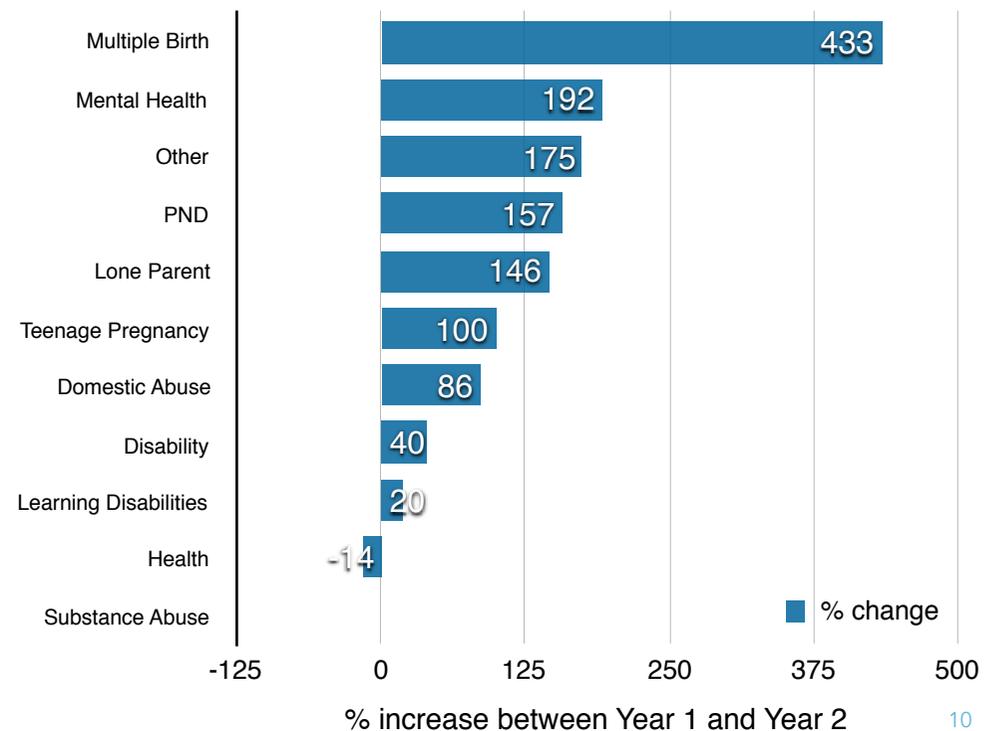
Steve Allman | November 2016

Increasing Areas of Need

Analysis of Home-Start Kernow's referral data for Years 1&2 of the Big Lottery Fund project indicates that all areas of need have increased substantially in Year 2, with the exception of Health which saw a minor decline.

Referrals to support families with multiple birth, mental health, post natal depression, lone parents and teen pregnancy more than doubled in Year 2.

BELOW: THE CHART SHOWS THE REASONS FOR REFERRAL BY PERCENTAGE CHANGE BETWEEN YEARS 1 AND 2, WITH THE HIGHEST BEING MULTIPLE BIRTH (+433%) AND LOWEST BEING HEALTH (-1%)



Feedback from Families

“Just knowing there’s a charity that exists to support parents like me makes me realise there must be other parents like me; I’m not alone.”

“Without Home-Start, it would have taken longer to recover from post-natal depression and longer to build up my confidence and get out of the house again. My volunteer gave me the confidence to continue with my treatment when I was ready to give it up and also encouraged me to get back into college.”

Home-Start Kernow supported 90 families in Year 2, bringing the total number of families supported by the Big Lottery Fund grant so far to 135. Home-Start Kernow are particularly interested in using the evaluation to note improvements in identified needs and determining families’ levels of satisfaction with the service, in addition to exploring what works well and what can be improved.

Families engaged in the evaluation in both Year 1 and Year 2 report significant levels of impact, with 100% of families engaged in Year 2 likely to recommend Home-Start to others. 21 families engaged in the evaluation towards the end of Year 2 with the majority being interviewed by the evaluator by phone (16) and some responding to SMS and email surveys (5).

“I needed help but I was too proud to admit it. I thought there was a them and us, that charities like Home-Start were for families like them, not families like us. Then I realised that I was them, that they were us.”

Impact on Families

Families report that Home-Start support has the highest levels of impact on feeling less isolated, improving family wellbeing and gaining confidence. Families suggest the lowest levels of impact on meeting other families, accessing local services and support networks and improving self-esteem:

- 84% of families report improved confidence to at least some extent.
- 68% report improved self-esteem to at least some extent.
- 73% suggest Home-Start has enabled them to engage in new activities to some extent.
- 68% report improved parenting skills.
- 39% have been supported to meet other families with children to some extent, although 50% of families engaged in the evaluation have not been supported to do so, but neither might it have been one of their identified needs at the start of their support.
- 94% of families feel less isolated by at least some extent, 58% to a high extent.
- 88% of families report improved family wellbeing.
- 68% of families have been able to access a wider support network to at least some extent.

“Home-Start has made such a big difference. I’ve learned new ways to play with my son and gained lots of confidence in my parenting. I’ve also met two fantastic volunteers who put a smile on my face just by walking through our door!”

“Home-Start Kernow has helped me rebuild my confidence, make friends with other mums and meet up for coffee in Truro. Without their help, I’d still be feeling very depressed and isolated.”

“Because of Home-Start, I’m more aware of the support network for parents and I feel less isolated as a result.”

“Without Home-Start, we would never have coped with the circumstances we were in. At the very least, I think I’d be a single parent now and divorced from my husband. Our volunteer helped us and gave me the space to deal with things in my own way, which has made us a much stronger family.”

Improvements

Feedback from families engaged in the evaluation was overwhelmingly positive and, when asked about improvements, there are no “stand out” suggestions. However, some families engaged in the evaluation report small improvements based on their individual experiences which the board of trustees and staff team will take into consideration when delivering the project during Year 3.

One parent had a difficult experience with a volunteer who was unreliable due to problems with her own childcare arrangements; a seemingly isolated, but inconvenient, set of circumstances. Another parent would prefer her volunteer to be more local, another suggested she would be happy to pay for travel expenses for volunteer a fourth would welcome more parent groups.

Most notably, volunteer availability in rural areas and awareness raising, the two improvements suggested by parents in Year 1, were not identified in Year 2 and the evaluator believes this is the result of significant progress made by Home-Start Kernow in the intervening 12 months.

Feedback from Volunteers

“I helped a family to have their voice heard at Core meetings by giving mum the tools and confidence to speak up. Before the meeting, we’d take time to write a list of all the things going well and the things that need working on. Mum would read the list at the start of the meeting so that she actually had a voice, instead of just being talked at.”

“I was matched with a family who had been through domestic abuse and couldn’t leave the house without fear. Being able to meet them in a safe place and knowing how much getting out meant to them made it worthwhile.”

Volunteering is an essential component of Home-Start Kernow’s model of home-visiting support, which sees potential volunteers undergo a rigorous recruitment process followed by comprehensive training before being matched with local families to provide friendship and support.

At the end of year 1, our evaluation found that Home-Start Kernow had worked hard to re-establish its volunteer base and ensure sufficient numbers are trained to support families across the county and this shows no sign of slowing during Year 2, with 7 preparation courses delivered to 32 new volunteers, bringing the current size of the volunteer team to 66.

The charity is particularly interested to find out whether volunteers are satisfied with the support offered to enable them to deliver a quality service and gaining feedback from volunteers is a key part of the evaluation process. 34 volunteers engaged with our evaluation in Year 2, a 61% increase on the level of response in Year 1, with 100% of volunteers in Year 2 reporting they feel valued to a very large or large extent.

All of the 34 volunteers engaged at the end of Year 2 reported a very good (82%) or good (18%) experience of volunteering with Home-Start Kernow, with the number of volunteers giving the highest score for their overall experience increasing by 11% this year compared with the same survey at the end of Year 1.

100% of volunteers report their experience of the application process was very good (76.5%) or good (23.5%) and all volunteers report that the preparation course, one of the key benefits to volunteers, prepared them for their role to a very high extent (82%) or high extent (18%).

Asked about being matched with their family, one of the most critical aspects of Home-Start support, 88% of volunteers reported a very good experience of being matched; a significant improvement of 21% on our Year 1 evaluation when 67% reported a very good experience.

Volunteers feel supported by the staff team at Home-Start Kernow, with 85% ranking the frequency of supervision and support as very good, the highest score and an 18% improvement on Year 1. Furthermore 94% of volunteers engaged in the evaluation suggest the supervision and support they receive is very helpful.

“Sometimes all mums and dads need to hear is I’ve been there, I’ve felt like that too, you’re not alone in struggling with this problem.”

“I supported a family for ten days by looking after their new baby whilst their older child had treatment at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London.”

Benefits of volunteering

Having worked with a number of other Home-Start schemes around the UK, the evaluator finds Home-Start volunteers to be an altruistic group who are usually motivated by a strong desire to help local families rather than benefit from the experience in any way for themselves.

The same is true for volunteers at Home-Start Kernow who might not immediately consider themselves as beneficiaries. However, our evaluation finds significant benefits to volunteers in Year 2, including:

- 100% have shared skills and experience to at least some extent, almost half of them to a large extent.
- 94% have developed new skills by at least some extent, almost half of them to a large extent, improving on the same score in Year 1 by some 18%.
- 94% have gained experience, with a little over half (51%) reporting gains to a large extent.
- 91% have increased confidence by at least some extent, 44% of them to a large extent.

- 44% suggest that volunteering has, to at least some extent, improved their employability. This is a small improvement on Year 1’s score (38%) but a further 44% suggest that it’s not relevant as they are not seeking employment having retired or already working.

Benefits to families, as seen by volunteers

Volunteers engaged in the evaluation report a number of ways in which their support has helped families, ranging from everyday support to increase confidence and self-esteem to helping parents engage with local groups and services. Volunteer perceptions of the level of impact Home-Start support has on families has increased significantly in Year 2 as the findings show:

- 100% believe Home-Start enables parents to gain confidence to at least some extent, 56% of these to a very large extent.
- 97% believe that Home-Start enables parents to become active in their local community to at least some extent, a 12% improvement on the same finding from Year 1 (85%).
- 100% of volunteers believe Home-Start reduces isolation to at least some extent; a 5% improvement on Year 1 but also a larger proportion of volunteers (62%) suggest isolation is improved to a very large extent, the highest score, compared with Year 1 (52%).

- 100% of volunteers believe Home-Start enables parents to improve parenting skills to at least some extent, with 53% suggesting it does so to a very large extent.
- 100% believe Home-Start enables parents to build strengths to at least some extent, 62% to a very large extent, the highest score.
- 97% of volunteers believe Home-Start enables parents to give their children positive life experiences, 68% to a very large extent.

“A lot of mums are feeling low, sometimes just through tiredness, and I’ve been able to boost their confidence. One mum was thinking of having her young baby adopted but ended up keeping the child because Home-Start was there to help her through a bad patch.”

“I modelled different ways of managing children’s behaviour and it felt good to see parents use these ideas and say they’d found them useful.”

“I give mum and her son lots of praise and focus on the positives; she seems a lot happier in herself as a result.”

Volunteers Top Tips

At the end of Year 2, volunteers were asked for their top tips for new volunteers or anyone thinking about volunteering with Home-Start Kernow. Here is a selection of their top tips:

“As a volunteer you support people more than you realise, just being there is often enough.”

“Make the most of your training; ask millions of questions.”

“Remember the work you do to help a family may be the only support they have.”

“Remember that everyone has had different life experiences so be open-minded. Some parents didn’t have good role models and will need a lot of hand-holding and confidence building.”

“Don’t expect to move mountains; every tiny success is a bonus.”

“Be yourself on the training course, it will help to ensure you’re matched with the right family.”

“Don’t underestimate how much volunteering will benefit you as well as the family. I come away each week and feel I’ve really made a difference.”

Areas for improvement

Volunteers identify just two areas for improvement, both of which were identified in Year 1 and have since been addressed by Home-Start Kernow; these are additional social opportunities for and additional training.

Home-Start Kernow continues to attempt to organise social opportunities for volunteers but finds such events to be logistically challenging in such a large county and, in any case, attendance at these events is always very low.

With regard to additional training opportunities, one volunteer surveyed in Year 2 would welcome training in specific topics including Autism and Epilepsy and Home-Start Kernow will look at how these opportunities can be built into the training programme, as they did for the topics identified in Year 1 (mental health, drug and alcohol awareness and safeguarding).

Feedback from External Partners

Home-Start Kernow has a successful track record for working in partnership with other organisations with a view to extending the benefits for families. In the past, the charity has contributed to a number of key strategic documents impacting on children and families services; including Cornwall Early Help Strategy, the Child Poverty Needs Assessment for Cornwall and the Cornwall Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for children, Kernow Matters.

On a local level, Home-Start Kernow works alongside local partners including referrers, such as social workers and health visitors and other providers supporting local families. Staff and volunteers also support parents to engage with statutory processes, such as attending Core Meetings (CAF) and Child Protection planning.

During Year 1 of the Big Lottery Fund project, the key challenge for Home-Start Kernow was re-establishing the profile of the charity with local partners following its near-closure the previous year. To this end, Home-Start Kernow has taken a proactive approach in re-establishing these links and networks and this is acknowledged by the 12 external stakeholders engaged in the evaluation towards the end of Year 2 who report that Home-Start Kernow’s willingness to work in partnership is very good (82%) or good (18%).

In Year 2, 100% of external stakeholders report a very good (64%) or good (36%) opinion of Home-Start Kernow and they all report the process of referring a family as very good (55%) or good (45%). Stakeholders report a

positive impact on local families, with gaining confidence and reducing isolation being the two outcomes which they feel Home-Start Kernow impacts on to the most extent. 100% of those engaged in the evaluation suggest that the charity impacts on the following outcomes to at least some extent (ranked in order of extent):

- Gain confidence (36% very large extent, 64% large extent).
- Reduce isolation (55% very large extent, 27% large extent, 18% some extent).
- Build parenting strengths (46% very large extent, 27% large extent, 27% some extent).
- Provide children with positive experiences (36.5% very large extent, 36.5% large extent, 27% some extent).
- Improve parenting skills (27% very large extent, 36.5% large extent, 36.5% some extent).
- Become active in the community (27% very large extent, 18% large extent, 55% some extent).

Strengths

Being able to engage with families in need by building a natural relationship rather than a statutory relationship remains Home-Start Kernow's key strength in Year 2, according to external partners. Those engaged in the evaluation value the important role of Home-Start Kernow in supporting local families, but also in supporting statutory processes and working alongside statutory

services to achieve real outcomes for families who often don't meet the criteria to receive other services, as the selected quotes below suggest:

“I think being non-statutory means Home-Start are seen as non-threatening, so they're more welcomed by families when it comes to meeting their specific needs.”

STEPH WEAVER, HEALTH VISITOR, CORNWALL NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

“Home-Start Kernow works in partnership with other agencies to ensure positive outcomes for children based on the family's needs.”

MELANIE BERRYMAN, SENIOR FAMILY WORKER, CHILDREN'S EARLY HELP, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

“Home-Start's strength is that it engages hard to reach families that don't meet the threshold for other services.”

BECKY CROSS, HEALTH VISITOR, CORNWALL NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

“Using volunteers helps families to engage in a way that is more difficult for statutory services to do. Home-Start has a good understanding of safeguarding, provides good feedback and attends regular meetings.”

CLAIRE TRIVETT, SOCIAL WORKER, CHILDREN'S EARLY HELP PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL CARE

“The match of the volunteer to the family and their needs has been brilliant. The volunteer has helped the family to achieve the targets they were set by the Early Support process.”

SABINE LETCHFORD, SENIOR PORTAGE WORKER, CORNWALL COUNCIL

“Home-Start provides ongoing support for isolated families where other services have previously been involved and completed their actions.”

MIRIAM MOORE, FAMILY WORKER, EARLY HELP TEAM

Improvements

The importance of volunteers in delivering the Home-Start model is widely acknowledged, with 100% of external partners describing the quality of volunteers as very good (55%) or good (45%) and a number of partners refer to the comprehensive level of training provided to new volunteers by Home-Start Kernow.

However, partners recognise the challenges faced by Home-Start Kernow in recruiting volunteers in the right place at the right time to support local families, particularly as a small charity covering a large rural county such as Cornwall.

As in Year 1, increasing the number of volunteers remains the primary improvement identified by external stakeholders in Year 2, with only 36% of partners describing volunteer availability as very good or good, although it should be noted that this is an improvement on our findings in Year 1 (25%), which could be the result of Home-Start Kernow's own efforts or their

proactive decision to commission a PR agency to promote volunteering opportunities across the county.

In addition to promoting volunteering opportunities, in Year 2 external stakeholders express a desire for Home-Start Kernow to improve PR overall, particularly in relation to increasing the charity's presence online. Some stakeholders wish to engage with Home-Start online more, such as making referrals online, and would like Home-Start Kernow to be a more visible presence at statutory team meetings and local forums.

Gaps in Local Services

External stakeholders identified three specific gaps in local support for families which they believe Home-Start Kernow would be well-placed to address. As in Year 1, external stakeholders suggest again in Year 2 that Home-Start should consider supporting families with children over the age of 5. There is also a suggestion that social groups for older mums would be beneficial as they tend to feel uncomfortable about attending groups with younger mums and first time mums.

Finally, there is the suggestion that the number of families being based in Cornwall with the Royal Navy is increasing and these families are often isolated and could potentially benefit from support by Home-Start Kernow.

Challenges

Home-Start Kernow has made real progress in addressing the challenges identified by our evaluation in Year 1. The charity continues to “bounce back” following near-closure in 2014 and has had tremendous impact on local families, exceeding all Big Lottery Fund outcomes in the second year.

Early in Year Two, the evaluator supported Home-Start Kernow to devise a spreadsheet to capture data relating to Big Lottery Fund outcomes more easily and calculate the progress of these outcomes against original targets. The charity followed up on our previous recommendations relating to marketing by commissioning a PR company on a fixed-term basis during Y2.

At the end Year 2, volunteer recruitment remains as the primary challenge for Home-Start Kernow. The charity has made significant progress this year but recruiting volunteers to match the locations of families across such a wide rural area remains a logistical challenge for the team.

Capacity is also a key challenge. As mentioned previously, Home-Start Kernow is the only scheme in Cornwall and, consequently, staff and volunteer resources are stretched across a much wider area than in other schemes.

Finally, sustaining the level of impact on local families is a challenge for Home-Start Kernow as it enters the third and final year of Big Lottery Funding with the level of need increasing, as discussed earlier in the report. Trustees are taking a proactive approach to exploring options for continuation funds but there are not currently any substantial funds in place beyond 2017.

Recommendations

There is no doubt that Home-Start Kernow is having a positive impact in the lives of families in Cornwall and the evaluator is impressed by the level of progress made by the charity over the last 12 months during Year 2.

Feedback from families, volunteers and external stakeholders is extremely positive and the project is highly regarded by those who witness its impact.

As we enter Year 3 with the challenge of sustaining this level of impact on local families in mind, the evaluator offers the following recommendations:

1. To make best use of the evidence gained in the evaluation by building a case for support to share with potential funders at the earliest opportunity.
2. To update the Strategic Plan devised during Year 1 and devise an accompanying Fundraising Strategy for Home-Start Kernow, with consideration given to segmenting funds by areas of need.
3. To develop formal partnerships with other local organisations who can support HSK in delivery of key outcomes and meet rising needs.
4. To continue to develop creative approaches to volunteer recruitment across Cornwall, perhaps by working in partnership with other organisations or developing a bespoke Volunteering Strategy.

Acknowledgements

The evaluator would like to acknowledge the contributions of all stakeholders who have contributed to the evaluation, but particularly the families who shared their stories, which are sometimes complex or of a very personal nature, in the hope that it will illustrate the impact of Home-Start Kernow.

About Home-Start Kernow

To find out more about how Home-Start Kernow helps local families, volunteering opportunities or funding needs, please contact HSK directly:

www.homestartkernow.org.uk | 01209 214490

About Home-Start UK

Home-Start Kernow is affiliated to the national charity Home-Start UK, a network of over 250 schemes which supports 32,000 families a year. Home-Start Kernow pays an annual affiliation fee to Home-Start UK in return for support and use of the brand. As an independent charity, staff and trustees are fully responsible for fundraising and generating income streams.

About Steve Allman

Steve Allman is an independent evaluator with an extensive background in children's services, both at a strategic level and practitioner level working directly with families. He supports charities to evaluate and communicate their impact and use it to develop sustainable strategies. He has a particular interest in Home-Start, having worked with 25 schemes around the UK.

www.steveallman.com | 01473 353600