



Bedfordshire

Outcomes and Statistics April 2025 to 31st March 2026

Our mission is for all children in Bedfordshire to have the best possible start in life because childhood can't wait.

To do this we run a range of services supporting children and their parents.

We have a small staff team of 6 part-time staff and a large volunteer team of approximately 60 local people. We have been running services for local families for 42 years.

Current services are:

1. Home Visiting Volunteer Service

We recruit, train and manage volunteers with parenting or significant experience with children to support vulnerable families. After attending an initial Preparation Course Home- Start volunteers are carefully matched with a family, and visit the family in their home for up to 2 hours each week for a period of time with a planned set of outcomes to work towards.

The type of support depends on the family's needs.

This could be:

- Emotional support to help parents find ways to manage and resolve problems
- Listening visits for parents with mental ill health
- Encouragement and support to attend Children's Centres and local resources
- Assistance with attending medical appointments
- Advocacy
- Assistance and mentoring with managing children's behaviour
- Modelling good parenting
- Embedding parenting strategies e.g after attending parenting programmes
- Assistance and mentoring with developing household routines
- Assistance and mentoring with cleaning and decluttering the house
- Help with budgeting, nutrition and meal planning, cooking and making the home safe
- Helping parents get their children ready for school
- Support both in and after leaving Refuge for parents and children who have fled domestic abuse

Many families find being supported by a parent volunteer less threatening and stigmatizing. Research has shown that our support increases parental confidence in bringing up children, enables families to access local services, reduces isolation for parents and children and generally increases resilience in families making a lasting impact.

"Before homestart sent a volunteer to help me I had absolutely no confidence with myself as a mother and was rarely leaving the house. I was petrified of being alone and couldn't even put my

baby in his pram and take him for a walk through fear of him crying and me being by myself when it happened. I was very lonely and didn't want to go to groups as I felt lacking in many ways and was sure that the other mums would notice.

Homestart sent an incredible volunteer named Linda. I was very nervous at first as I find it difficult to meet new people and let them into my life. But even on her first visit, L made me feel so so relaxed and comfortable, it was like I had known her forever. She soon felt like someone I really looked forward to seeing and who was a huge support to me. I cherished our time together and she made me feel confident in all my choices raising my son. With my new boost of confidence I was soon able to go the groups with L by my side and when our time was up, even go by myself. Something I never saw myself doing.

Loneliness during early motherhood can feel extremely consuming but knowing I had someone coming to see me that day completely changed my mood and really saved me on my dark days.

It's actually very hard to find the words to describe what this charity have done for me, they were like someone holding my hand even when they weren't there.

Thank you so much homestart, you've been amazing!"

At 31st March 2026:

164 Central Bedfordshire families with 343 children were referred for home visiting support.

64 families with 124 children received volunteer support

63 families with 142 children received office support

37 families with 77 children were waiting to be matched

2. SEND Parent Mentors

This is a small project but has continued to be very popular with the need exceeding the small team of volunteer mentors.

Our mentors have their own experience of parenting a child with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) such as autism or ADHD.

At 31st March 2026:

SEND Parent Mentor	19 families with 29 children
Coordinator support	22 families with 43 children
Waiting for support	26 families with 38 children

Main Issues for referrals

- Struggling with understanding children's needs and behaviours.
- Seeking strategies and guidance to support children's behaviour from people who understand.
- Feeling isolated and overwhelmed
- Seeking emotional support - empathy, reassurance and connection.
- Children's needs not being met at school and difficulty accessing support
- Direction and signposting needed to help request a SEN Plan or EHCP.
-

Parents received an average of 6 weeks phone/online support by a trained mentor with the objectives of offering emotional support and practical help and knowledge around the pathways and services available.

“The SEND Parent Mentor service came at just the right time for me. Over the six weeks, having someone to talk to who truly understood made such a difference. I was matched with Maria, who was absolutely fantastic—she really listened, offered thoughtful advice from lived experience, and created a space where I felt comfortable to be open and honest. There was no judgement, just genuine support. I came away from each call feeling heard, encouraged, and more motivated to keep going. It’s a brilliant service that I’m so grateful to have been part of.”

Domestic Abuse Services

The Need

It is estimated that one in four women and one in six men will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lifetime. This may include years of psychological abuse.

Children are often the silent victims of domestic abuse which can have a long lasting impact on their life.

Our response

Alongside our home visiting service for women and their children in Refuge and after leaving Refuge we also continued to deliver the Own My Life programme.

3. Own My Life

Own My Life is a ten week programme. The purpose of the course is to educate and empower women who have been subject to domestic abuse to regain ownership of their own lives.

We run the course online in the evening as women reported that this makes it more accessible. It enables women to join from all around the county, including those who are working during the day or have children.

We ran three Own My Life courses between April 2025 and March 2026.

34 women attended Own My Life. The women were parents to 73 children.

Significant increases in emotional and physical health were reported.

What service users said:

“(When my daughter) is old enough to understand life's complexities, I will share my story with her, including the steps I took and about the people I met along the way who helped me to get back on my feet. This way, she can see how independent we can be and the strength and kindness that can be found in the hardest of times.”

“Your guidance has been invaluable during one of the toughest phases of my life. I am deeply grateful to everyone who supported me in rebuilding my life for the better.”

Domestic Abuse Prevention

Domestic abuse is endemic in society and we therefore feel it is important to look at prevention beginning with teaching children about healthy relationships.

3. Helping Hands

Helping Hands is a six week course developed by Women's Aid for children aged between 7 and 11.

The objectives of the course are for children

- to understand their right to a safe home environment,
- develop resilience and good self-esteem,
- to realise how their behaviour affects others and
- to learn to manage strong feelings without violence and gain a knowledge of non-violent problem-solving skills.

We were really pleased to continue to run seven Helping Hands courses this year in Central Bedfordshire primary schools.

Feedback from schools

"The areas covered in Helping Hands are important to the children, they can talk more easily being in a small group. Boosting their self esteem is really important. Many find the ways to deal with anger very helpful and also identifying who they can go to if they need help. Covering these issues is very hard in a whole class situation and the children that attend the groups are often those who would find it hard to speak up in a class situation."

Feedback from children:

"I enjoyed the keeping safe week, to know where to go and who to talk to. I also liked the anger week. I've tried a new way to try and calm down

I enjoyed the looking at what makes a good friend. I really liked all the colouring"

"I enjoyed the feelings week, there was lots of drawings and I like that."

I always feel angry. I enjoyed the cutting and sticking activity looking at different ways for me to try to calm down.

"I liked the feelings BINGO it was great fun".

"I liked the week when we looked at what we can do. It made me realise I could do lots of things"

57 children in 9 schools took part in the Helping Hands programme.

4. Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities Parenting Programmes

Children don't come with a manual. We are the local deliverers for the EPEC parenting programme.

(EPEC) is an accredited research based programme from the Centre for Parent and Child Support, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust. EPEC parenting courses are led by local parent facilitators who have completed accredited EPEC training and receive ongoing training, supervision and support to ensure safe, high quality, and effective practice.

Parents attend eight weekly two-hour sessions. During these sessions, parents learn strategies for improving the quality of their interactions with their child, reducing negative child behaviour and increasing their efficacy and confidence in parenting. The sessions involve group discussions, demonstrations, role play and homework assignments.

Impact

- Improved parenting and family resilience through teaching well-evidenced parenting strategies and methods.
- Greater understanding of managing family stress.
- Increased social capital and employability through training parent group facilitators.

This year we ran 9 courses. 85 local parents attended.

These were Being a Parent, Being a Parent of an Autistic Child and Being a Parent of a Child with ADHD and Living with a Teenager courses. We have continued to deliver all of the programmes online, as parents expressed that this made it more accessible. As Central Bedfordshire is a large area it is difficult to find a convenient place to run a face-to-face group.

What our service users said:

“Best thing that ever happened to me. Made me realise how much I was getting wrong.”

“I think the fact the hosts could relate to our situation made me feel confident to open up and not feel alone.”

“I have been on every ASD and parenting programme available, this has been the best so far. The facilitators really know the challenges of parenting as they have been there themselves which is refreshing from all other programmes.”

5. Child Poverty

Many families are struggling to make ends meet as the cost of living continues to rise. Limited income and mounting expenses force difficult choices between essentials like food and energy bills.

We continue to pass on donations of toys, slow cookers, eclectic blankets, clothes and presents to families from donors and have funded items such as a bike and a bed for a child.