



Parenting across Scotland Member Case Study  
**HOME-START UK**  
2024

## **About Home-Start UK**

Home-Start UK works with families in communities right across the UK. Starting in the home, our approach is as individual as the people we're helping.

Each Home-Start is a local community network of trained volunteers and expert support helping families with young children through challenging times. There are 29 Home-Starts in operation across Scotland.

## **Natasha's story**

“Every person at every step of the way has got me here.”

“I couldn't go to baby groups. I couldn't be around new mums swapping birthing stories and talking about C-section scars, breastfeeding and how many hours they were in labour. I didn't have a story I could share. My story would likely result in a loud silence that would fill the room. And anyway, my story was not one I felt able to tell.

I still find it hard to talk about, but the work I've done with Home-Start East Lothian has really helped me to process what happens. And while hard, I can talk about it. Just. It was traumatic and left me with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Premature birth, pre-eclampsia, sepsis, and a lengthy stay in hospital for me; group B strep, jaundice, premature birth and a lengthy stay in the neonatal for Lexi, there was a lot to work through. I'd been assigned a neonatal psychologist, but they only stay with you for a year. Once the year was up my health visitor was worried I had no other support in place.

My health visitor connected me with Home-Start. Evelyn from Home-Start East Lothian came to see me. She talked about the Happy Babies Happy Mind group and asked if I wanted to come. But I was fearful of groups, they just weren't for me, and I explained how I wasn't comfortable talking about my birth experience. That's when Evelyn said these groups aren't like that, everyone there will have an issue or challenge they're overcoming.

Two hours went by, but I hardly noticed. It was so easy to talk to Evelyn. During those two hours I laughed and cried, but most of all I felt totally at ease. I felt like I was being really listened to, and it was clear she had my best interests at heart. She told me everything I was feeling was normal. That meant the world to me. It was the first time anyone had said

how I was feeling was normal. Up to this point I'd be encouraged to 'move on' and that 'at least I had a healthy baby now'.

Knowing how anxious I was about attending the group, when the day arrived Evelyn came to my home and we walked together. It was the little things that mattered. The weather that day was terrible, but even though it was blowing a gale, Evelyn was happy to stand outside for a few minutes, while I built up the courage to walk through the doors.

Having Evelyn by my side made all the difference. She introduced me to the group leader Kirsty and whispered into my ear 'don't tell anyone but she is even nicer than me'. Evelyn attended the group for the next couple of weeks until she was confident I'd settled in. In the short time I spent with her she made me feel so comfortable when I was at my most fragile.

Picking up the baton from Evelyn was Kirsty. Kirsty has been absolutely amazing. She went above and beyond. She showed me that people do care, she has made me believe in myself and opened my eyes that I am not alone.

One of the things I said when I first started the group was that no matter what I couldn't talk about my birth story. It's because of Kirsty that she made me feel comfortable enough to do it. It's not that my PTSD has magically vanished, but the group helped me to find a way to live with it more comfortably.

I'm very protective of Lexi. At the beginning of this year, I would never have left Lexi with anyone. Even now there are few people I would trust with her. But one of those people who I most definitely do trust is another amazing lady from Home-Start, Jennifer.

When I first started the group, I was told that there was a creche and that we could leave our little ones with Jennifer while we went upstairs to talk. I felt sick! Kirsty made the situation easier but seeing how attentive and amazing Jennifer was with the kids settled me enough to get me out the door.

I'd always felt guilty seeing someone else play with Lexi because that was my job. But I watched as Jennifer gently put her on some pillows and read to her. Not long after she was asleep. My little girl isn't a cuddler, but when I saw her cuddling Jennifer, it was lovely.

I was with the group for a year and was really worried about it coming to an end. Kirsty agreed to keep me on, but a couple of months ago I decided to stop attending. It was a hard decision, but I wanted my place to go to a mum who was struggling as much as I was a year ago. The group has helped me hugely, but it was now time for me to move on.

I was still on the waiting list for psychological support so Evelyn suggested a home visiting volunteer may be able to help during the transition period. This led to the next amazing person in my life from Home-Start, Emily.

When you live with mental health issues some days can be very hard. Those difficult days Emily would sit with me and we'd have a good chat. Other days she'd convince me to go out for a walk or to the library. On those occasions when I've had a panic attack, it's reassuring to know that Lexi is safe with Emily while I take some time out to recover. Emily is so kind, easy to talk to and supportive. I feel very comfortable with her and feel like I can speak to her with zero judgment. She makes me feel very relaxed when she visits. Knowing she will be visiting once a week gives me something to look forward to.

I appreciate everyone at Home-Start for all the support I've had. I hate to think what would have happened if Home-Start wasn't there. A year ago I couldn't walk into a room with people. Now Lexi and I enjoy soft play, trips to the library and doing new things. I'm not fully there yet, but I'm much further down the path than I'd ever imagined. And getting me there has been the most incredible, kind and simply wonderful group of women I could have ever met.

Natasha, proud mum to Lexi