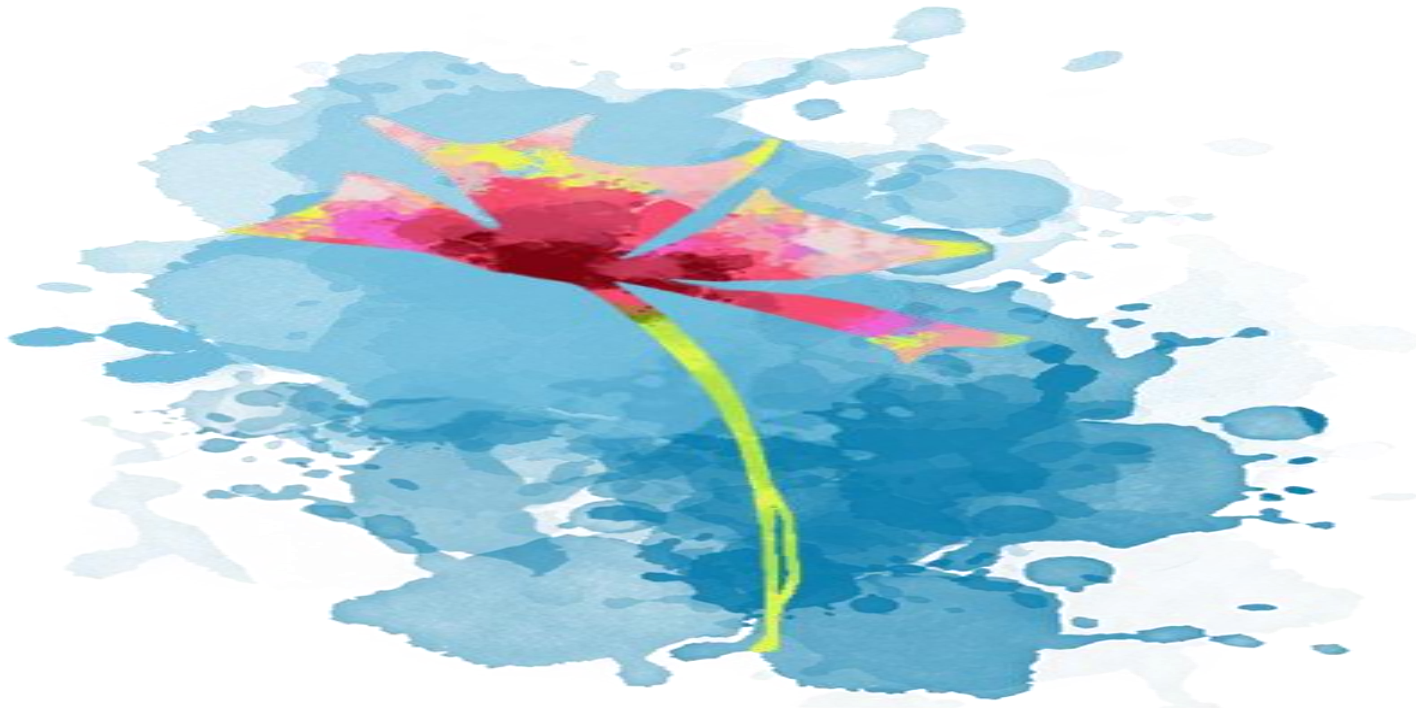


# Working in Partnership throughout Thanet

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## Home-Start Thanet ~ Supporting and Empowering Families



Sharon Lewis  
Executive Manager/Safeguarding Lead & Embrace Counsellor  
Home-Start Thanet

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## Home-Start Thanet

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## Introduction

**Home-Start** is a well-established early intervention organization delivering family support services to families throughout the Thanet locality. We have over 34 years' experience in supporting all aspects of parenting, mental and physical health and wellbeing with parents and children. In addition, we have delivered detailed programmes to support children with psychological and behavioural issues.

Our holistic family approach allows us to engage well with both families and individuals, building a trusting relationship to promote positive change for parents and young children, building aspirations and resilience for the future. Home-Start provides a unique outreach service into the family home, or by remote contact (***This started as COVID cases increased, we have resumed home visiting at this current time.***)

Weekly input is made from either a skilled staff member and/or a trained volunteer Mentor. Following an initial assessment, a Programme of Change is drawn up between the family and us. Emotional support is offered along with structured parenting/child focused programmes or more intense psychological support through our Embrace Counselling Service. Sustainability of the organization along with positive outcomes for hundreds if not thousands of Thanet families since we launched, is due to commitment, understanding of local need, the skills and knowledge of highly trained staff, experience, and a flexible approach.

Home-Start started its life in Thanet in 1987 by providing a core family support service of home visiting and group support, however we have developed this greatly over the following three decades by analyzing local need and structuring focused programmes to support these needs. Therefore, in addition to the core Home-Start family support offered, we have delivered a diverse range of programmes.

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In addition to a small staff team who are trained and qualified in a range of disciplines, from nursing, teaching, counselling, artwork, health, and wellbeing, we recruit and train local people, predominately parents themselves to become Home-Start Mentors and to give additional face to face support to families and children. To keep our quality standards, staff and volunteer Mentors are regularly trained in all aspects of family work. Monitoring and evaluation is key to all we undertake, and our organization is externally audited and researched periodically.

## Core offer

We remain committed to delivering our current four programmes of early intervention support to local families, during what will no doubt continue to be a challenging time as we slowly come out of Covid restrictions and adapt to a new way of living. We are also planning to develop our group Art Therapy Programme, which was successfully piloted during October 2021.

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## The Embrace Programme ~ a psychological support programme for parents and their children

This is our family outreach programme which provides parents and children with tools to reinforce coping skills and resilience to life's transitions. Our holistic approach focuses on strengthening individuals and ultimately families, offering a range of therapeutic approaches to promote change.

We enhance and reinforce positive and practical strategies, parenting ability, and child/parent relationships. By offering bespoke interventions to help reduce stress and empower individuals in building resilience to face life transitions and /or overcome past trauma.

Psychological support is offered to parents, and they are given space and regular contact to discuss concerns and issues important to them.

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This programme also offers support to parents struggling to deal with a child displaying disruptive or negative behaviours. Teaching through play and routine is a way forward for the child to deal with anxiety, stress, or disruptive behaviours. Our Art Therapy Group will enhance this.

**Our needs-led interventions and psychological guidance are offered weekly for up to six months to: -**

- ❖ A family with at least one child under 11.
- ❖ Parents who present with low mood, anxiety, panic disorder, and depression.
- ❖ Parents or children suffering past trauma
- ❖ Women impacted psychologically through domestic abuse.
- ❖ Women recovering birth trauma or suffering from postnatal depression.
- ❖ Parental discord impacting negatively on family life.
- ❖ Children displaying challenging behaviours, impacting on their ability to socialize, develop or adapt to change. *(If this is the primary focus, please refer to our Butterfly Programme)*

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**Home-Start Thanet**

## Embrace Counselling Service

This free counselling service provides individuals with head space to talk through current or past issues impacting on their daily life.

It offers a diverse range of therapeutic approaches depending on the need of the client. A counselling contract is drawn up with each client and reviewed as sessions progress.

At the point of initial referral, it is important to consider: does this person need emotional support by weekly contact with a member of our staff team or are they ready and requiring counselling for more complex issues.

Who can you refer ~ parents trying to deal with more complex issues impacting on family life and impacting on relationships and access to outside services: -

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## The Counselling Programme offers support to: -

- ❖ Men and women struggling to deal with relationship issues ~couple counselling is also offered, with both committed to attend.
- ❖ Struggling with depression and/or anxiety to the level it is impacting on daily life and their ability to parent.
- ❖ Bereavement and loss.
- ❖ Negative repeated thoughts. Panic attacks
- ❖ Past trauma both in childhood and adulthood
- ❖ Perinatal depression/birth trauma
- ❖ Trauma following domestic abuse

If you are not certain regarding referring, please contact me in the first instance [sharonlewis@homestartthanet.org.uk](mailto:sharonlewis@homestartthanet.org.uk)

If you feel a parent would benefit from counselling, I offer up to ten free sessions at a time suitable for them. This is flexible and if required a few additional sessions can be offered, or the client can be referred on for further psychological assessment.

Sessions last up to an hour and this is currently mostly offered by phone/Skype contact. It is vital therefore the parent can have this time free and a confidential area at home so they can discuss how they are feeling, uninterrupted.

Under normal circumstances sessions are offered by appointment in the office and no doubt this will start happening again as restrictions are lifted and if Covid numbers remain low.



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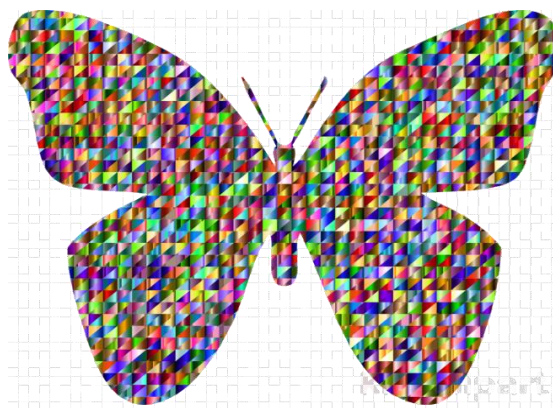
## Home-Start Art Therapy Group

In looking at local need and analyzing our data for the last two years, as part of our development plan we are launching an **Art Therapy Group**, to run as an initial pilot for 4-6 weeks. Using creative craft and artistic input we will form two groups, one for the children which will involve a diverse range of fun and creative activities. This will enhance both our **Embrace and Butterfly Programmes** with a focus on improving psychological wellbeing. The other part of the group is designed for parents to create personal journals, searching out their aspirations and creativity.



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## The Butterfly Programme

Our Butterfly Programme aims to strengthen children and ultimately families, reinforcing coping strategies, parenting ability, and child/parent relationships. The focus of support is on the child and their emotional, cognitive, and behavioural issues.

We also support children on the Spectrum, whether diagnosed or awaiting diagnosis.

We offer bespoke support interventions to reduce stress and child anxiety, helping children build resilience to face life transitions, such as starting nursery, attending groups and the transition into school.

Teaching, through play and routines, a way forward for the child to deal with anxiety, stress, or disruptive behaviours. We now also provide support packages via post.

We engage with parents, supporting and encouraging them to make small changes: - to play more, talk more, listen more,

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and maintain consistency with their child.

Our prime outcomes are to reduce stress and improve behaviours and mental well-being of children now and in later life.

## Who can you refer: -

- ❖ A family who has at least one child under eleven and lives in Thanet. Our prime focus is often on the younger child, pre-school and during the transition into school, although we will also offer guidance for older children.
- ❖ We support children displaying emotional stress ~ anxiety, anger, low mood and struggling to adapt to transitions.
- ❖ We support families awaiting a formal diagnosis for their child (ADHD/Spectrum Disorders).
- ❖ Children displaying negative/challenging behaviours affecting family life and relationships with siblings and in peer groups.
- ❖ We work with parents struggling to maintain boundaries and consistency with their children.
- ❖ We support children who may have been impacted by domestic abuse or where parental discord is impacting on family functioning



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## Volunteering with Home-Start ~ Our Mentors

We have 34 years' experience in recruiting, vetting, and training local parents or those with childcare experience to allow them to feel secure, increase their knowledge and who are fully supervised, to enable our Home-Start families not only to get an initial assessment of need but then together with a staff member also have additional support from another parent, a Home-Start Mentor.

Therefore, in addition to a skilled staff team, we have the additional benefit for families of our wonderful volunteers, predominately local parents who undergo a pre-course interview, an induction course, post course interview and are eventually matched to a family, where they can offer weekly support and guidance.

All our volunteer Mentors are required to attend an initial training before they are matched, we require two references and a DBS check prior to matching to work with a family. We also provide add-on training workshops to enhance their initial learning and to prepare them fully for the important role they take on in supporting some of Thanet's most vulnerable parents and children.

Mentors build a trusting relationship with families, offering a wide range of interventions from emotional support and parenting guidance to strategies to strengthen attachment, showing the importance of play and educational guidance. In addition, support with children who are on the Spectrum/behavioural issues, plus if required transport to and from appointments.

**Their role enables families to build up resilience and parents to build upon their self-esteem and parenting confidence, to build and nurture stronger families, strengthen resilience, and support them to achieve individual and family aspirations.**

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**We offer training in a diverse range of topics, here is a sample of the training we offer. ~**

- \*The Standards and Methods of Practice @ Home-Start
- \*Their role as volunteer Mentor, including the importance of commitment, boundaries, and confidentiality.
- \* They are aware of the organizational structure and how Home-Start fits in well with other supportive agencies providing early intervention to Thanet's families.
- \* Safeguarding
- \* Values and Attitudes ~ Inclusion
- \* Communication Skills/body language
- \* Mental Health Part 1 and 11
- \* Domestic Abuse Part 1 and 11~ signs, symptoms, and patterns. How to break the cycle and safety planning
- \* Adverse Childhood experiences (ACEs)
- \* Brain development and Attachment
- \*The Importance of Play

**All our staff and Mentors are trained and receive regular supervision.**

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## Strategic Development Plans ~ Moving Forward

We are able to offer a flexible and efficient service to Thanet families, and accept both agency and self referrals. We are planning to secure additional funding following our data analyses of need to develop our organisation further over the next few years.

**The Home-Start Play Plus Programme** ~ funding will be sought to support this programme which will complement our Butterfly Programme. It focuses on school readiness, improving child/parent interaction, and developing speech, language, and cognitive skills. Our initial target area is Margate, however with sufficient funding we will run this throughout the locality.

**Bump-Start with Home-Start** ~ this will be a focused perinatal programme for pregnant women (3<sup>rd</sup> trimester) plus support offered any time postnatally until the child is one. They will then be signposted to one of our other programmes if required.

We understand the importance of an empathetic and nurturing approach to new mothers or those experiencing low mood/post-natal depression or requiring support with the needs of a new baby. Our aim will be to assign a trained Mentor to offer weekly support and guidance as required.

**The Starting Right Programme** ~ supporting Health and wellbeing by one-to-one support with diet, budgeting, cooking, nutrition and the importance of exercise, plus healthy start for babies, toddlers, and older children. We have already delivered this over a five-year period; however, funding was only for this set period. It proved to be so successful that this is certainly a positive programme to re-establish at some time in the future.

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## Previous Home-Start Thanet Programmes ~ Our experience/expertise

Over the last three decades I have sought and secured funding to enable us to develop experience and ability to deliver a wide range of family and psychological programmes, to enable Thanet families to maintain good mental health, and understand the need to keep themselves and their children physically healthy by diet, exercise and seeking out appropriate health services as required.

**Core Home-Start** ~ delivering weekly home visiting to local families with a child under 11 (originally up to the age of 5).

**Basic Life skills** ~ ensuring families understand the importance of family routines, budgeting, healthy diet, cooking skills, plus networking in the community and reducing isolation.

**FIT Group (Fathers in Thanet)** ~ Supporting fathers by providing a dedicated male family support worker by offering a holistic home visiting service, plus running a Saturday breakfast club. An excellent opportunity for fathers to get emotional and parenting support, plus meet other fathers going through similar issues.

**The Enjoy and Achieve Programme** ~ A three-year programme focusing on early years and parenting, supporting with child development, positive attachment, and the importance of play in both social and speech and language development. We provided toys and educational toys, routine charts, visual prompts, and fun activities to enhance the parent-child relationship and development.

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**The Big Hopes Big Futures Programme** ~ A follow-on from the Enjoy and Achieve programme with increased focus on school readiness.

**Breaking the Cycle and the New Start Programme (Domestic Abuse)** ~ Both these programmes support women and children that are or have been impacted by domestic abuse both physically and psychologically. Both staff and volunteer Mentors are trained in all aspects of domestic abuse/controlling behaviours, plus safety planning. These programmes helped and continue to support women and children (men too, if referred in as impacted by abuse) to understand the traits of an abusive partner, the impact on the psychological welfare of victims of abuse and support recovery and strengthen resilience to move forward.

**Supporting Young parents (Teenage ~ 24-year-olds)** ~ A bespoke programme designed to start support with young parents in the third trimester and guide them through the early days of parenting, plus support with postnatal depression and to build a strong attachment between parent and baby. (The Solihull Approach).

**Building Better Opportunities** ~ In partnership with Gingerbread/Lottery and European Social Fund we delivered an intensive programme to encourage parents back into education and eventual employment.

**Any of the above standalone programmes can be restarted if the need arises.**



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For further details or advice contact: -

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Referral forms for both agency and self-referrals for all programmes are obtainable: [admin@homestartthanet.org.uk](mailto:admin@homestartthanet.org.uk)

Please also refer to our website [www.homestartthanet.org.uk](http://www.homestartthanet.org.uk)