

# Lothians Charity celebrates thirtieth anniversary



*Thirty years of ensuring families don't fall through the net*

Home Link Family Support, a small Lothians charity that supports families with pre-school children is marking its 30th anniversary this week.

'It's been a life saver,' says Kelly, speaking about the small local charity that supported her last year when she had post-natal depression and struggled to get out of bed. 'The things I was so worried about at the time have just disappeared. As a family we're nearly there. I feel so much better in myself. I feel so much stronger and that I can do it now.'

Kelly is describing her experience with Sue, a volunteer home visitor provided by Home Link Family Support, an award winning Edinburgh and Midlothian charity that is 30 years old this month.

Home Link Family Support aims to give children a positive start in life by supporting families at home. Regular help from a volunteer enables a family to develop skills that they can draw on to increase their confidence in their ability to be good parents. So that they need less support from overstretched Health Visitors and Social Workers.

The volunteers receive extensive training to prepare them to be positive, non-judgemental and great listeners. "It's a big deal being invited into someone's home," says Sue, "it's not easy to ask for help, and as a volunteer I really respect the family's lifestyle and decisions. I'm there to make things easier, and definitely not to wag a finger or judge.'

Sue visited Kelly for nearly a year and is moving on to a paid job supporting teenage parents. 'I'd never have been brave enough to go for this job without the experience I got from volunteering,' she says.

There are dozens of reasons that families ask Home Link Family Support for help: many are lonely and isolated; some want to be more confident parents; some are new to the area and need help to settle in; some mums have Post Natal Depression and need extra support. Families with children under five in South Edinburgh or Midlothian can refer themselves or ask their Health visitor about the service.

The volunteer will fit in with what the family wants and help with outings, reading and playing, mealtimes and bedtimes; and will always have time to give space for the parents to discuss their worries and concerns.

Dave, a Volunteer in Midlothian says: 'I feel I take some of the pressure off the family. When you are helping with small children it doesn't take a lot – most of the time I play games with the kids. If it's a nice day we go out into the garden and kick a ball about. Or we play inside with toys, drawing and colouring in and we read a lot together. I also make time for the other members of the family to ask how their week has been and any problems or concerns they have come up against and we have a laugh. It gives the family a couple of hours every week that's just for them.'

Thirty years ago Home link family support was just a tiny organisation in Oxgangs. Today it is still small but its 75 volunteers supported 135 families and 189 children in 2014/15. 75% of families they worked with in 2015 say that they are coping better and have improved their parenting skills; 60% say their relationships are better and 57% have also noticed an improvement in their health.

The charity is funded mainly Midlothian Council and The City

of Edinburgh Council with generous support from The Robertson Trust, R S MacDonald, Cattnach trust and the Big Lottery Fund and many smaller trusts and foundations.

Their recent awards include Midlothian Volunteer Team of the year 2015 and have been rated Excellent twice by Quality in Befriending from Befriending Networks.

If you are thinking of volunteering this year and you'd like to work with children and families, Home Link Family Support would like to hear from you.

Website <http://www.homelinkfamilysupport.org>

Submitted by [jane Ellis](#)

