

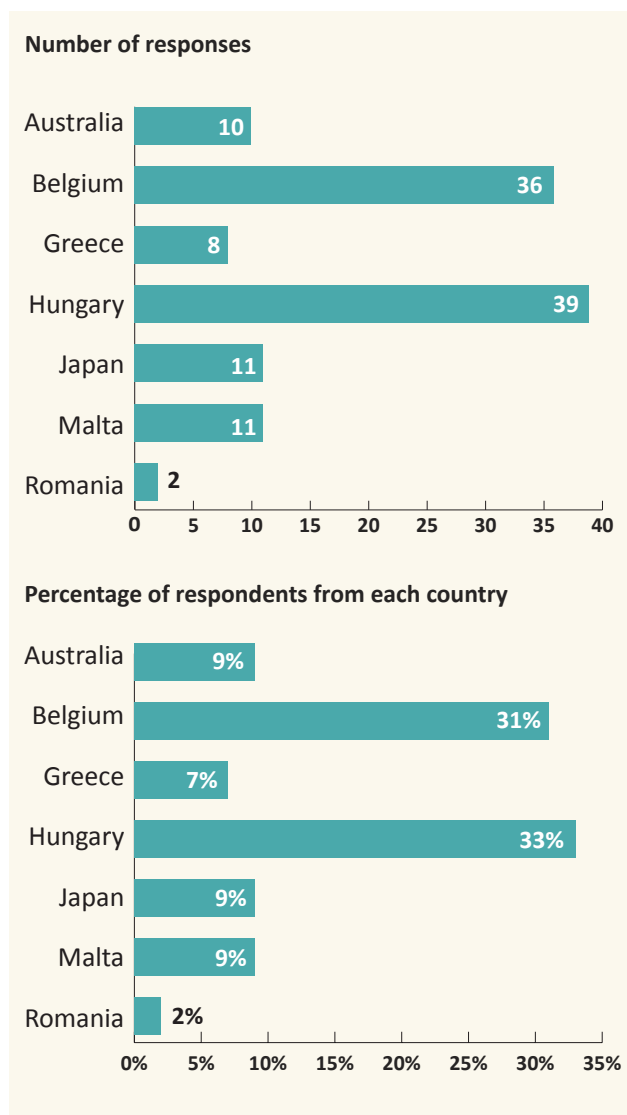


Volunteering with Home-Start Around the World

**Findings from our international survey
2023**

Introduction

In May 2023, Home-Start Worldwide coordinated a survey for volunteers around the world. We were hoping to better understand volunteers' motivations, to see what similarities and differences there were across the world and to test the feasibility of one survey across multiple languages and countries.



Questions had specific response choices to enable some consistency, but there was also the possibility for respondents to write in their thoughts and ideas, adding to the richness of the findings.

Colleagues in Home-Starts in Australia, Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Japan, Malta and Romania supported with translations and reached out to their volunteers to complete the online survey.

We are extremely grateful to them, members of the Home-Start Worldwide research group and academics Professor Jacqueline Barnes and Dr Veronika Bone for their support with the design and analysis on the data.

But most of all, thank you to our volunteers around the world, for sharing with us your experiences and for all of the work you do to support families.



“

I really look forward to spending time with my Home-Start family each week. The children are an absolute joy and I adore them. I know that I'm helping the mother and she enjoys seeing me delight in her children. I know that my volunteering is as good for me as it is for the family.” - Australia

Key Findings

Volunteering with Home-Start Around the World - Survey Results



7

Countries

Australia, Belgium,
Greece, Hungary, Japan,
Malta and Romania



117

Volunteers



617

Years
of volunteering
between them



Supporting
over
500
families

Supporting families



96%

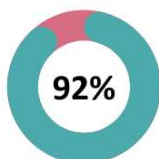
could see how their support helped the
families they worked with



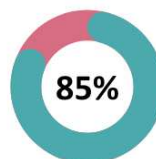
88%

found their skills and experience matched
the family's needs

Training and support



found the support of the
professional Coordinator
useful or vital

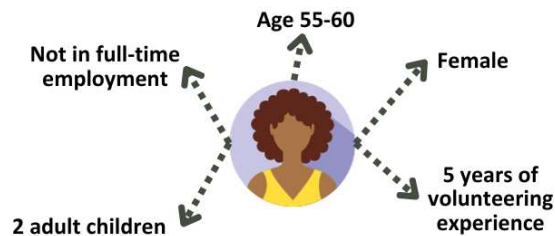


said the training made
them more confident to
do their role

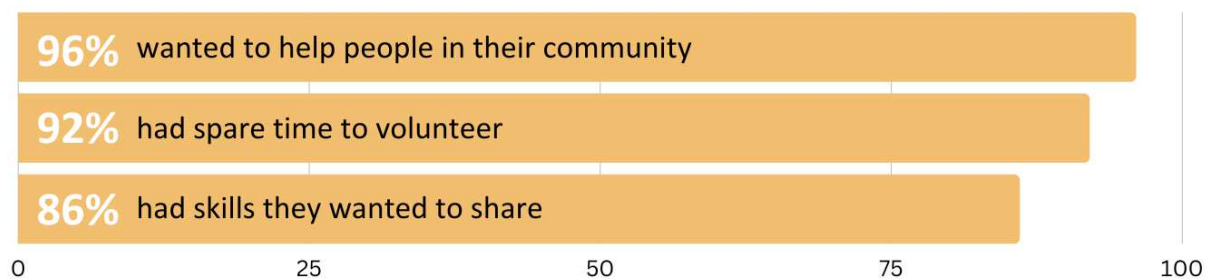
Volunteering with Home-Start Around the World - Survey Results



Typical characteristics of survey respondents



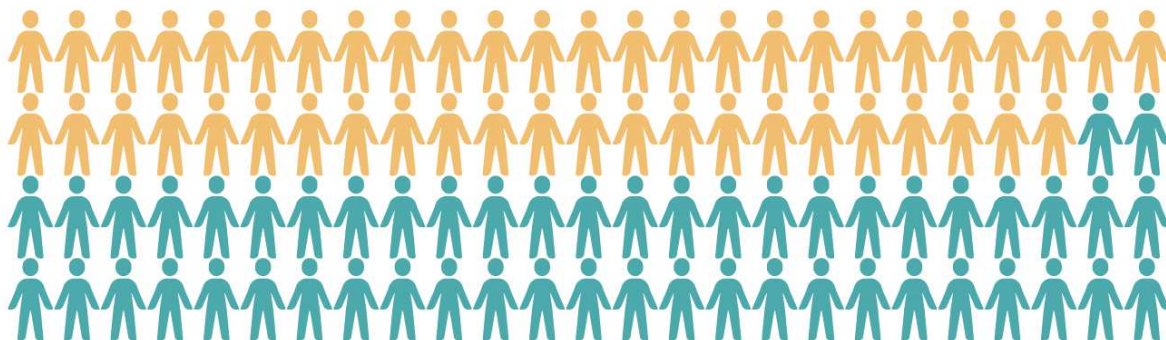
Volunteer motivations



Benefits of volunteering



Nearly half of volunteers (48%) improved how they interacted with their own families



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Detailed Results

Demographics

We received

117

responses from

7

countries.

95%

of respondents were female.

Ages ranged between 22 and 77 but the majority of volunteers were in the older range with the average age being 58.

62%

of volunteers were retired or working full-time, with only 20% of volunteers working full time.

92%

of volunteers had children of their own but mainly these were adult children over the age of 18 (78% of volunteers who reported having children, had children over 18; 8% had children under 6 years).

Volunteers came from a range of educational backgrounds. While

65%

had a degree,

26%

of volunteers left education after high school.

We wanted to understand the motivation and experiences of Home-Start volunteers so it was important that the volunteers who responded had sufficient experience.

63%

had over 2.5 years of experience and

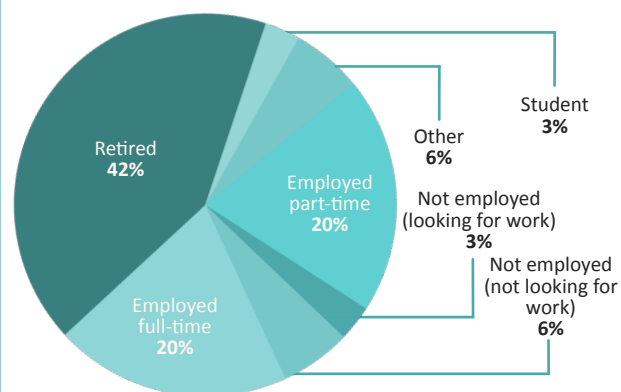
9%

had more than 16 years.

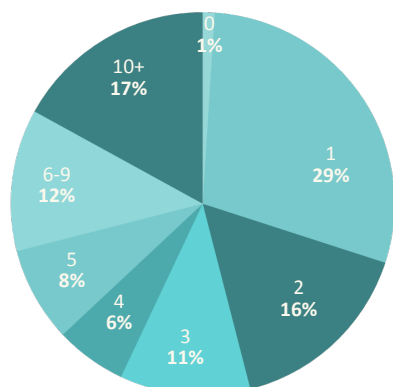
29%

of our volunteers had worked with six or more families. The median number of families was 3.

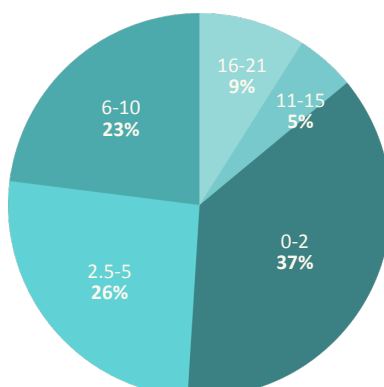
What is your employment status?



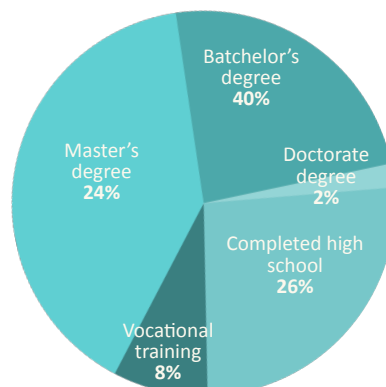
How many families have you supported?



How many years have you volunteered with Home-Start?

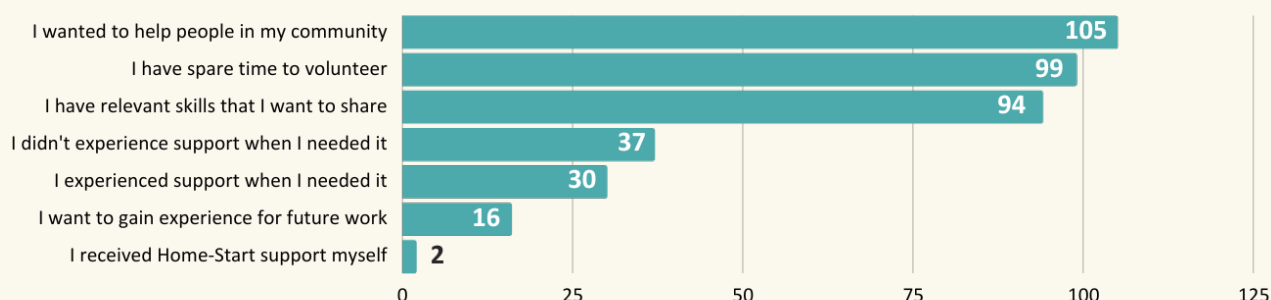


What's the highest level of education you have?



Motivations and experiences

What inspired you to become a Home-Start volunteer?



Some motivations were nearly universal across all volunteers:

96%

of volunteers wanted to help people in their community.

92%

had spare time to volunteers.

86%

had skills they wanted to share.

61%

of volunteers were inspired by their own experience of raising children.

Of them,

45%

got support and wanted to provide it for someone else, while

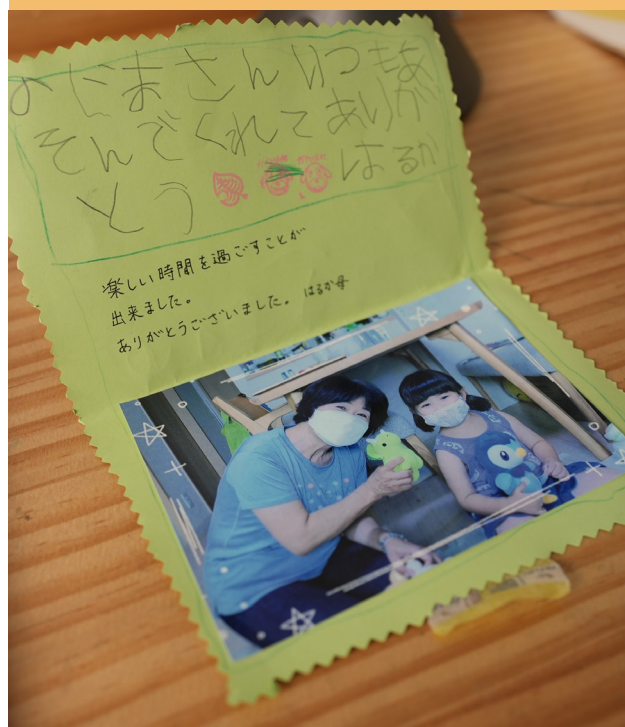
55%

wanted to provide the support they didn't get when they needed it.

"I wanted to support parents (particularly women) with young children to have confidence in their parenting skills and in themselves, positive recognition of the demanding stage in their lives."
- Australia

“

I want to be there for you so that you can raise your child with peace of mind." - Japan



"Since my retirement I've enjoy spending my free time building relationships with families with young children." - Hungary

The match between volunteer and family

Home-Start is said to work through the relationship developed between the volunteer and the family. But how do volunteers' experience the match?

The majority of volunteers, across all of the countries, had experienced matches where they were able to see that they were making a difference.

96%

said they could see how their support helped the families they were working with.

88%

of volunteers had experienced supporting families where the family's needs matched their skills and experience

However, many volunteers had also experienced situations where they were not able to support as much as they wished. More than half,

54%

had experienced working with families who

had more issues that they felt they could support with and

28%

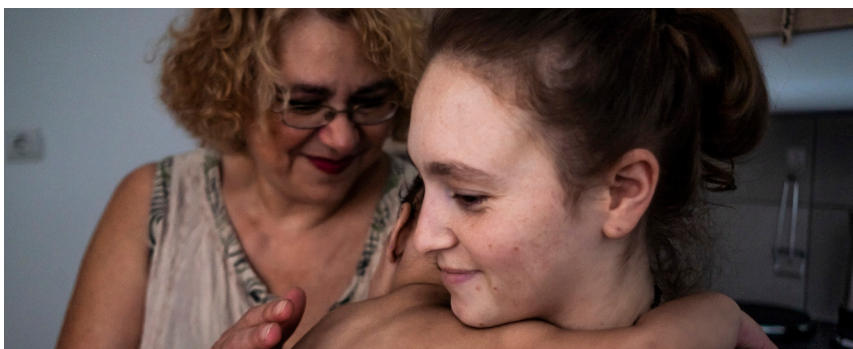
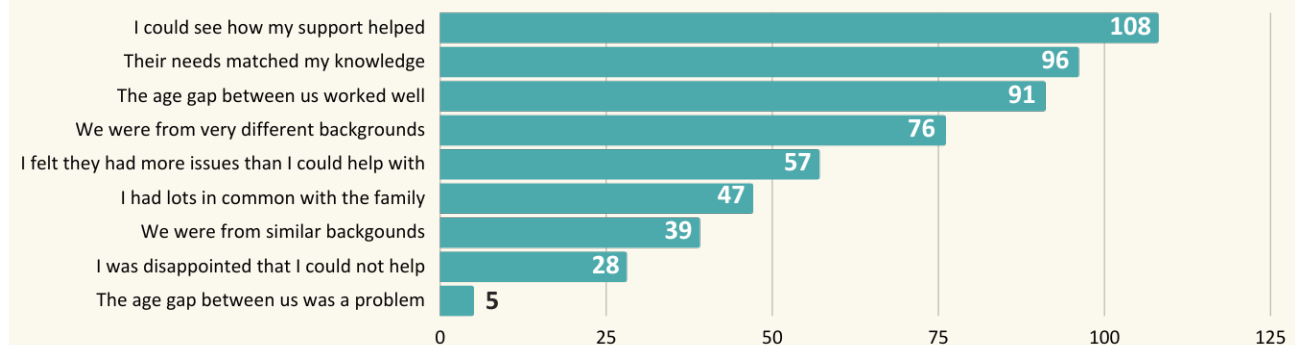
had experienced disappointment that they were not able to help their families more.

These responses highlight the limitations of volunteer support and the importance of local Home-Starts being embedded in their community so that they can refer families on for additional support. It also shows that volunteers experience different situations with each family they work with.

When asked about their ideal match with a family, there was substantial variation. Many volunteers thought that a match in backgrounds or values was important, while others indicated that they could adapt to any family that needed support.

Support was facilitated by a personal connection or "click", the family wanting and valuing the support and mutual trust and understanding.

What was your experience with the families you were matched with?



“

With proper guidance from the Coordinator, I can cope with any family.” - Greece



“

My first family was an ideal match and we still see each other although the family are no longer receive Home-Start services. We had an interest in creative arts and educational backgrounds were similar. My second family was more difficult culturally as the mother was from Vietnam and had no formal education and there was domestic violence in the mix. Although I could be helpful it was harder to make an emotional attachment.” - Australia

*“A personal ‘click’ is needed, but it is hard to grasp exactly what that is.”
- Belgium*

“I can’t think of an ideal match. It’s important both parties are mutually respectful, accepting of help and open.” - Hungary

Additionally, many volunteers had personal preferences of the types of families they enjoyed working with, for example, families with disabilities, immigrant families, or those with certain age children. For one volunteer this could be the opposite of what another preferred.

“I prefer families that are more challenging than others.” - Malta

The variety in volunteers’ experiences suggests that the role of the Coordinator in matching families to volunteers is especially important in ensuring the success of the support.

Equally, Coordinators have a role to play in ensuring the families involved in Home-Start will be able to benefit from the support offered.

“The key, however, is that the Coordinator should not take on a family that already needs something other than what the volunteer can provide.” - Hungary

“I felt more useful working with families who didn’t have multiple, complicated problems.” - Greece

“

It’s a good opportunity for both sides to learn about different environments and ways of thinking, even if they are not in the same environment.” - Japan



Volunteer training

85%

of volunteers said that the training provided by Home-Start made them more confident or that they couldn't have done their role without it.

Elements of the training that were particularly appreciated include:

- The enthusiasm of the trainers.

"The trainers were particularly good and made me feel like I was becoming part of a 'family' of likeminded people." - Australia

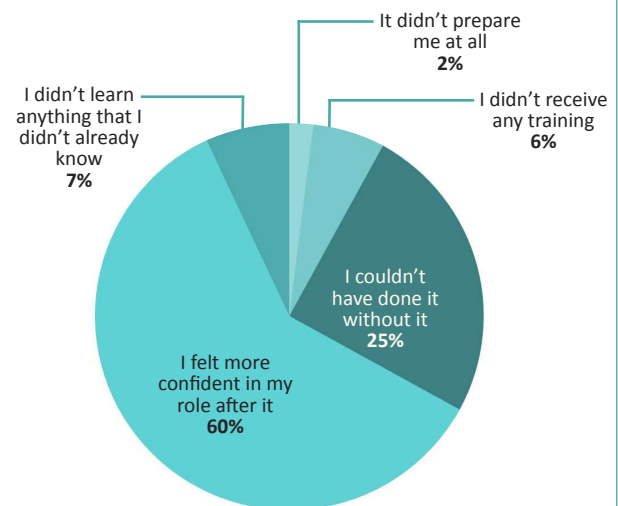
- Meeting other volunteers.

"It's important to get to know how the organization works and the fellow volunteers. Without this you cannot work well together in a job that requires such a great deal of trust. Trust is developed during the sessions." - Hungary

- Case studies and role play.

"The case-studies covered during the initial training made me think." - Belgium

Did the initial training course prepare you for your role as a Home-Start volunteer?



- The importance of boundaries, communication and attitudes.

"Knowing what the boundaries are for me was important as I had formerly worked as health professional and needed to be really clear about my role as a volunteer." - Australia

"After the training course, I learnt to respect others and not to assert myself too much." - Japan



“

I felt that the training helped me to understand the issues people are currently facing." - Japan

However, the fact that some volunteers reported not receiving training or that their training did not tell them anything they did not already know, suggests there is scope to improve the training offer to make sure it is being consistently applied and is tailored for all levels, depending on volunteer education and parenting experience. Suggestions to improve training included:

- More use of case studies and real-life examples.

“It would be good if more real-life problem cases were presented and discussed.” - Hungary

- More examples of practical help and information about signposting.

“Give more examples of the possible help that can be offered. Because when you arrive in your family, you don’t really know how to start. It’s important to get to know each other well first, but those people often have a lot of questions straight away and that’s what comes at you!” - Belgium

- Additional follow up training on the range of issues families are facing.

“We could benefit from more intense training and knowledge regarding mental health, autism, alcoholism etc. which are very possible realities within the families we support.” - Malta

- More input from current volunteers.

“ [It] could be more group meetings of old and new volunteers to help new volunteers feel more emotionally prepared at the initial family visit.” - Greece



Coordinator support

Volunteers also appreciated the way in which the professional Coordinator supported their volunteering, with

92%

saying they found the support either useful or vital.

Volunteers from across the nations valued being able to turn to their Coordinator when they needed extra support with a family situation.

"I didn't always need a lot of contact but knowing a co-ordinator was there to discuss issues was important. Also when domestic violence issues arose, I needed more guidance." - Australia

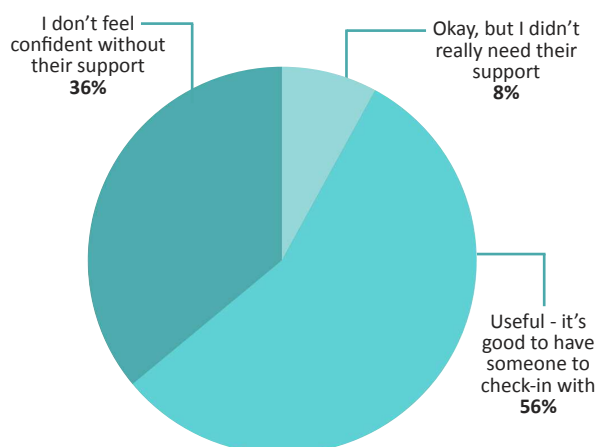
"If you have a problem or do not know how to tackle something, the Coordinator will always try to help you. This is very positive." - Belgium

"I am one of the volunteers who needed constant guidance, counselling and supervision which was always available for me. I feel grateful for the support offered." - Greece

"I think the Coordinator helps you the most with their availability. You can always turn to them for support in any situation." - Hungary

“
I think the relationship of trust with the Coordinator is important. It is important to contact them and discuss [any issues]." - Japan

What is your opinion about the support from your Coordinator/s



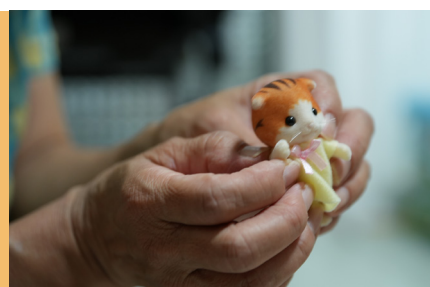
A much smaller number mentioned that they wanted more support from their Coordinators:

"Personally, it would be good to get more feedback from the Coordinator." - Hungary

"[I would like] for Coordinators to be closer with their volunteers." - Greece

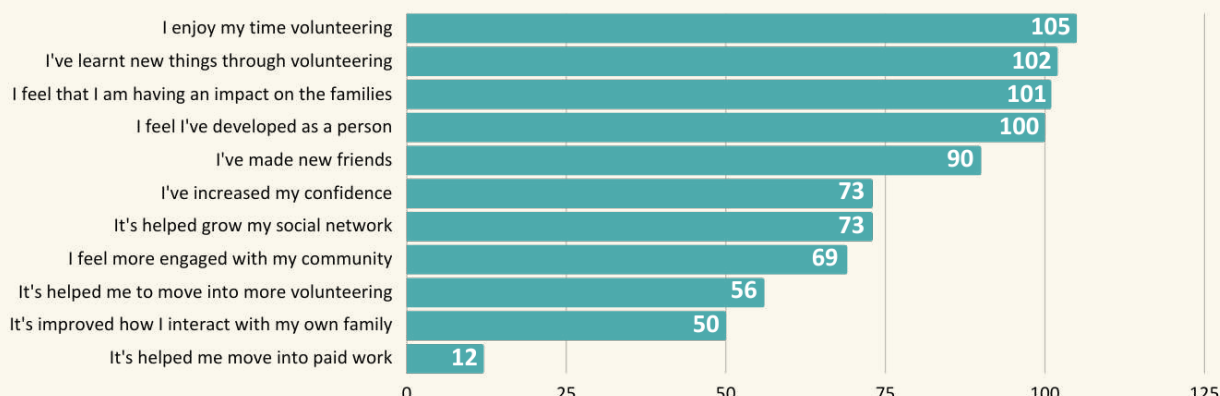
"Supervision could be more frequent and structured." - Belgium

All of these comments reinforce the value of a professional Coordinator for the volunteer.



Positive impacts of volunteering

Has volunteering with Home-Start had an impact on your life?



Despite volunteers coming from different cultures and backgrounds, there were some perceived benefits of volunteering that were universal.

97%

enjoy their time volunteering

94%

have learnt something new through volunteering

91%

feel they are having an impact on the families they support

89%

feel they have developed as a person

84%

have made new friends

Nearly half of volunteers,

48%

also reported that they had improved how they interacted with their own families.

Many of the open text responses expanded on these themes:

“

My life feels richer due to the bonds I have made with the family I currently support. It is great to see the children grow and develop and to feel that I am helping them in even a small way. It is great seeing the mum in the family become less stressed and happier, even though she has four children, who all of whom have health issues. There is a lot of love in that family.” - Australia



"It feels good to be part of a constructive, positive community." - Hungary

"It helped me a lot to better understand what happens around me." - Romania

"Volunteering makes your life richer and more meaningful. In my case there is a big difference in my world and that of the family that I support. It makes you think and reflect on your own life. It enriches you and also gives you satisfaction to be able to support your fellow man." - Belgium

"I was able to be around little kids again. This reenergised me and I felt love." - Hungary

"I had a major illness and lost my confidence. By participating in Home-Start, I recovered my original self-confidence." - Japan

Several volunteers also mentioned the importance of recognition, something that Home-Starts may wish to develop further:

"I won a prestigious award in our small town. I felt my work was recognised." - Hungary

Many volunteers also commented on how volunteering had helped with personal and professional development:

"In my interactions with the families, I learnt the value of different perspectives. Working with another person in a different life situation, with different emotions and thoughts to me, has made me more accepting and empathetic." - Hungary

"I used to be judgemental toward people and was selfish, but I got into the habit of seeing things from other perspectives. Also, the way I relate to my own family and how I feel about them has greatly improved." - Japan

"It has helped me to build relationships at work." - Japan

“

Most of all, it made me realise what I don't want to do and ultimately what I am strongest at." - Belgium



Associations between volunteer characteristics and their experiences

The following associations were noted in the responses.

- Being older was associated with more enjoyment in time spent with volunteering
- Being younger was associated with volunteering helping them to move into paid work
- The more families the volunteer supported, the more likely they were to report that:
 - o their confidence had increased
 - o they had built new friendships
 - o interactions with their own family had improved through volunteering
- The more years spent volunteering, the more likely they were to:
 - o have built new friendships
 - o perceive that they had an impact on families they have supported
 - o have moved into more volunteering in other organisations.



Implications of the results for Home-Start volunteer recruitment

We hope that the information from the survey can help Home-Starts across the world to recruit more volunteers. A range of benefits have been described by these Home-Start volunteers, in addition to the expected benefits for the families.

We hope countries can use the motivations that almost all volunteers shared and the benefits that almost all experienced to shape their recruitment campaigns.

There were some specific themes identified in the open responses that countries may also want to investigate further and use in recruitment campaigns. These including wanting to help families, including using the volunteers own experience and giving back to society.

"I wanted to help families without support enjoy the time while their children are small." - Australia

"As a mother of four, I gained a lot of experience that I felt I could offer to others." - Hungary

"I want to be there for you so that you can raise your child with peace of mind." - Japan

"I want to actively contribute to a better and more inclusive society." - Belgium

Some themes emerged more strongly in a specific country. For example, in Hungary, many volunteers mentioned that their families had moved away or they didn't have grandchildren of their own yet as their motivation for volunteering.

This may well be the case in other countries and could be a rich theme for recruitment.

Another way the results could support recruitment is through the creation of a "persona" of a typical volunteer. We know that a "typical" respondent to the survey was a university-educated woman in her late 50s with adult children of her own and likely to be retired or working part-time. From this it is possible to build a marketing persona, adding in the types of hobbies the volunteer may enjoy, the media they consume and the places they visit, all of which can help with targeted advertising and recruitment.

Conversely, there was also a wide range of volunteers who responded to our survey who do not match this description. A quarter,

26%

of the volunteers left education after high school,

20%

of volunteers were working full-time,

10%

were under 40,

8%

had children aged under 6,

5%

were men and

2%

had received Home-Start support themselves. There is therefore substantial potential to engage with individuals who do not fit the 'typical' profile, considering how to appeal to them further and widen the range of Home-Start volunteers we work with.

Home-start Worldwide will make available the survey results and all of respondents' quotes alongside social media graphics to allow member countries to use the results and resources in their volunteer recruitment campaigns.

Research across our network

This was the first time Home-Start Worldwide has coordinated research across the international network. We are delighted to have successfully rolled out a questionnaire across seven countries in seven languages.

What worked well:

- A team of country Coordinators and academics contributed to the development of the questionnaire to ensure it was relevant to diverse contexts
- Country Coordinators double checked the translations (originally done using DeepL and Google Translate) to ensure they were accurate
- Country Coordinators and local schemes were able to recruit volunteers to complete the survey
- The format and design allowed analysis across all of the countries but with scope for unique responses
- We have collated a wide range of statistics and quotes that help us to understand our volunteers' experiences and can be used for promotion and recruitment.

Challenges, limitations and considerations for future research:

- The small number of respondents for this initial study makes drawing any causal links impossible.
- The responses were weighted towards some countries with few respondents from others so generalisability may be limited.
- While we had a good global spread of countries and cultures, all were from high or high middle income countries.
- While we had some initial interest from South Africa, in the end none of the five Home-Starts in Africa took part in the survey. In future we would like to understand more around the barriers and how we can overcome these to ensure all Home-Starts can contribute.

Conclusions

Our survey showed that Home-Start volunteers from across the globe shared very similar experiences and motivations. Some experiences were nearly universal such as wanting to help people in their communities, enjoying their time volunteering and feeling as though they had made a difference to the families they supported.

The results also show that there are many perceived benefits of volunteering with Home-Start for the volunteers themselves, not only the altruistic support given to families. These included increased social connections, confidence and skills, all of which contribute to wellbeing.

The importance of training and the support of the professional Coordinator was clear. The vast majority of respondents felt both initial training and ongoing support from the Coordinator were

vital for them to be able to do their volunteering. However, 15% of respondents either didn't receive training or didn't find it useful so there is an opportunity to develop and improve training for all, based on the feedback above. Additionally, recognising and celebrating our volunteers is something that can be built on.

Having tested the approach and knowing that the network can collaborate on research internationally, the next step is to consider what else we would like to find out about volunteering and Home-Start, to further improve the impact of the work we do.

Based on the responses, we are keen to delve deeper into the relationship between Coordinator, volunteer and family and understand more deeply how successful matches are made and supported.

Thanks

With thanks to Professor Jacqueline Barnes, Dr Veronika Bone, Neel de Bruyn, Georgiana Cocie, Karlien Craps, Dr Bea David, Kirpal Dhadha, Remenda Grech, Evi Hatzivanriva, Reka Hegedus, Michelle McDonell, and Yukie Yamada, Home-Start Australia, Home-Start Belgium, Home-Start Greece, Home-Start Hungary, Home-Start Japan, Home-Start Malta and Home-Start Romania and all of the volunteers who participated.

Report by Lizzie Poulton, Network Development Lead, Home-Start Worldwide, 2023.



“

It seems such a simple idea to just visit each week and talk and play, but the results start to snowball as you see the mother and child flourish and you can be there applauding their success.” - Australia

Appendix 1: the questionnaire

No	Question	Dropdown options
1	What country are you based in?	
2	What year were you born	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open text
3	What is your gender?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female • Non-binary • Prefer to self describe
4	What is your employment status?	Tick all that apply. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student • Employed part-time • Employed full-time • Not employed (looking for work) • Not employed (not looking for work) • Retired • Other
5	Do you have children?	Tick all that apply. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No • Yes, aged 0-5 • How many • Yes age 6-18 • How many • Yes age 18+ • How many
6	What's the highest level of education you have?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have not completed compulsory education • Completed high school • Bachelor's degree • Vocational training • Master's degree • Doctorate degree
7	How many years have you volunteered for with Home-Start?	Select from dropdown 1-10+ or free text
8	How many families have you supported?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 • 2 • 3 • 4 • 5 • 6-9 • 10+
9	What inspired you to become a Home-Start volunteer?	Tick all that apply. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I received Home-Start support myself • I experienced support when I needed it and want to provide that for other people. • I didn't experience support when I needed it and want to provide that for other people. • I have spare time to volunteer • I have relevant skills that I want to share • I want to gain experience for future work • I wanted to help people in my community • Other (please share)

10	What was your experience with the families you were matched with?	<p>Tick all that apply. If you've supported multiple families tick any you've experienced with any family.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had lots in common with the family • I felt they had more issues than I could help with • We were from similar backgrounds • We were from very different backgrounds • Their needs matched my knowledge and experience • I could see how my support helped • I was disappointed that I could not help them more • The age gap between us worked well • The age gap between us was a problem <p>Can you tell us more? What is your ideal match with a family? [open text]</p>
11	Did the initial training course prepare you for your role as a Home-Start volunteer?	<p>Tick only one option</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I couldn't have done my role without it • I felt more confident to do my role after it • I didn't learn anything I didn't already know • It didn't prepare me at all • I didn't receive any training <p>Can you tell us more? How could we improve? [open text]</p>
12	What is your opinion about the support received from your Coordinator/s?	<p>Tick only one option</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vital- I wouldn't feel confident volunteering without that support • useful- it's good to have someone to check in with • OK but I didn't really need their support • not important at all- I could do my role without them • I don't have much contact with my Coordinator/s <p>Can you tell us more? How could we improve? [open text]</p>
13	Has volunteering with Home-Start had an impact on your life?	<p>Tick all that apply</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I enjoy my time volunteering • I've learnt new things through volunteering • I feel I've developed as a person • I've increased my confidence • I've made new friends • It's helped grow my social network • I feel more engaged with my community • I feel that I am having an impact on the families I support • I've improved how I interact with own family • It's helped me to move into more volunteering • It's helped me move into paid work <p>Can you tell us more? [open text]</p>
14	How has COVID changed your experience of volunteering with Home-Start?	Open text
15	Is there anything else you'd like to share with us about your experience of Home-Start?	Open text