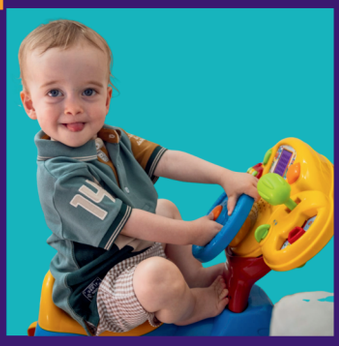
West Lothian

Strategic Plan

2026 to 2031



Our children are our future *and one of the basic responsibilities is to care for them in the best and most compassionate manner possible.*

Nelson Mandela

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Welcome

It gives me great pleasure to introduce our 2026-2031 Strategic Plan for Home Start West Lothian.

For more than 25 years, Home-Start West Lothian has provided support to parents with young children through relationships built on trust and practical help. Our volunteers and staff work alongside parents in their own communities, offering the support that enables families to grow in confidence and give their children the strongest possible start. We know that early intervention changes life chances, and for families facing complex challenges, our timely and trusted support can prevent difficulties from becoming crises.

However, the environment in which we operate is changing, and Home Start West Lothian must adapt. Families are facing rising costs, increasing pressure on public services, and fewer community spaces. At the same time, need is becoming more complex, with more parents and children experiencing mental health challenges, neurodiversity, and the lasting effects of trauma. This strategy recognises that reality. It sets out how we will continue to deliver early, preventative support while evolving our services, strengthening our partnerships, and building the organisational capacity required to meet growing demand.

Our ambition to support more families by 2031 is rooted in both evidence and our team's experience. By expanding our reach, developing targeted community provision, investing in staff and volunteer capability, and improving how we use data and digital tools, we will increase our impact without compromising the quality of our work. With the continued commitment of our volunteers, staff, funding partners and supporters, Home-Start West Lothian will remain a trusted, preventative presence in communities across West Lothian, helping children and families to build safer, more resilient futures together.

On behalf of the Board I want to thank all colleagues, volunteers, families, funders, elected members and stakeholders for not only their guidance in the launch of this strategy but their continued support and commitment to ensure that Home-Start West Lothian continues to be there for the families who need us most in our community.

If you have any feedback on our strategy please do email us at
admin@homestartwl.org.uk

Scott Coutts
Interim Chair of the Board

Our History

Home-Start in the UK was started in 1973, founded by Margaret Harrison who believed that supporting a family was best done in their home where it can be shaped to the needs of the family. She realised that if parents get support and friendship from another parent, they will be better equipped to learn to cope with the many difficulties life can bring and will be able to give their children the best possible start to their own lives.

This idea that started in Leicester, spread across the UK and is now a movement around the world. There are now 22 countries on five continents that have Home-Starts providing support for families.

Home-Start West Lothian, established in 2000, is its own unique charity, independent of Home Start UK but a member of the federation. While operating autonomously, we benefit from a strong national network for sharing best practice and maintaining robust safeguarding and family support standards.

We offer relationship support- and practical help to parents with young children, in communities throughout West Lothian. We recruit and train volunteers – who are usually parents themselves – to visit families at home with at least one child under 5,offering confidential, strength-based and trauma-informed support.

We also run groups in different areas helping parents meet new people, widening their links with the local community, building confidence and connections and reducing isolation.

Vision and Mission

We exist to enable every family we work with across West Lothian to be confident, connected, and supported, ensuring every child has the strongest possible start in life .

Strategic Context

See References on page 14

Policy context

- The Scottish Government's Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) approach always underpins our work with children and families. It's rights-based approach and focus on wellbeing are embedded in our practice
- We work collaboratively with children, families and stakeholders from across children's sectors to ensure UN Convention on Rights of a Child (UNCRC) incorporation truly makes rights real for babies, children and young people in West Lothian
- We are committed to the principles of The Promise – Scotland's national commitment to transform care-experienced children's lives - embracing them and embedding it into our work with families
- We align ourselves close with The West Lothian Children's Services Plan 2023-2026: every child should have the best start in life to enable them to: have high aspirations, build the foundations for living well in the future, and realise their potential
- Evidence that early, trusted, relationship-based support helps prevent difficulties from escalating and improves outcomes for children and families, particularly in communities experiencing deprivation.
- We do not replace statutory services, nor do we provide crisis, enforcement, or mandated interventions. Our strength lies in early, voluntary, relational support, delivered in partnership with statutory and third sector organisations, that helps families cope, connect, and build confidence

Operating Environment

- West Lothian Council closing many community centres, reducing families' access to spaces to interact and build relationships
- Reducing council and health services
- Many third sector organisations closing or facing financial pressure
- Reducing frequency, reliability and connectivity of public transport services
- A rapidly reducing focus on early intervention/prevention from statutory services
- Increased threshold for intervention of statutory services
- Cost of living increasing
- Numbers accessing food banks increasing
- Numbers on free school meals increasing
- Numbers in temporary/ homeless accommodation increasing
- Increasingly difficult funding landscape – many funds paused, or set restrictive terms
- Volunteering across Scotland on a downward trend: down 25% between 2023 and 2024

Needs of Families in West Lothian

- Increasing number of complex families including high numbers with some form of trauma
- Increasing number of families with children who have Additional Support Needs
- Increasing numbers of families with children who have behavioural challenges and/or struggle with dysregulation
- Increasing numbers of families with adults with mental health problems
- Changing nursery hours and uncertainty around future changes driving more parents and children needing support in the community

Developing our Strategy

The voices of our families, staff, volunteers, funders, board, and partner agencies have been vital to developing this strategy. We have combined our stakeholders view with an internal review framework and integrated national research and insights shared by public sector bodies, third-sector organisations, and academic institutions.

Stakeholder Consultation

We consulted in person and online with nearly 100 of our key stakeholders.

Staff were involved in forming the questions and developing the framing for the consultation questions.

The **top three** priorities across all respondents were agreed on:

- Provide parenting support group around children's behaviours
- Establish a group supporting parents with neurodivergent children
- Set up more Stay and Play playgroups in locations where there are limited services

Our consultation results clearly supported the professional opinions within the team and Board, and validated the emerging internal picture of how our services need to grow and evolve.

40 Families

8 Volunteers

40 Partners

Developing our Strategy

Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results

Strengths

- Constant community presence with 25 years of continuous support to local families; known and respected by council and NHS teams
- Proven, effective relational model: Volunteer–family relationships that build confidence and resilience
- Skilled, trauma aware staff team: Long-serving staff with local knowledge and empathy towards families
- Sound governance and financial stability
- Collaborative ethos: we currently work closely with other third sector organisations, NHS and council teams
- We align our services to Scottish and UK Policy frameworks including GIRFEC, The Promise the incorporation of the UNCRC and cost-of-living initiatives, embedding these as best practice within HSWL
- We proactively modernise and remain responsive to change, ensuring continuous adaptation to evolving priorities and emerging needs

Opportunities

- Growing awareness of mental health & neurodiversity challenges: Opportunity to extend support for families navigating diagnoses and pressures from nurseries and schools
- Digital reach: Low-cost channels (Teams, WhatsApp, Facebook Groups) can extend peer and volunteer training support without adding in major spend
- Cross-sector partnerships: Chance to co-deliver groups and services with NHS and/or community bases for efficiency, reach and opportunities for shared training
- Volunteer recruitment and engagement: Re-imagined campaigns could attract new, skilled volunteers from identified sectors

Aspirations

- The leading family support charity in West Lothian, recognised for evidence-based, compassionate, and equitable help
- Present in every SIMD 1–3 community, so that no family is excluded due to location
- Employer and volunteer charity of choice, where people feel valued, trained, and supported
- Partner agency of first resort for statutory agencies, when seeking early, preventative interventions
- Voice for families – influencing local systems and amplifying lived experience in policy discussions

Results

- As family needs become more complex and statutory thresholds continue to rise, supporting more families requires careful prioritisation, skilled staff and volunteers, and strong partnership working. This strategy recognises the need to balance growth with quality, ensuring that increased reach does not dilute the effectiveness of our support
- Reach: Two times more families supported annually by 2031 compared with 2024 baseline
- Coverage: Active delivery in most SIMD 1–3 areas of West Lothian by 2031
- Complexity: Increased staff confidence and competence in managing higher-need cases
- Reputation: Recognised through active partnership roles in NHS and/or council-led strategic programmes
- Sustainability: Income diversified across multiple funding streams, with a focus on non-traditional funders
- People: 90% staff and volunteers report “clear purpose” and “adequate support” in annual survey

Our Strategic Aim to 2031

Home-Start West Lothian will provide timely, effective support that improves wellbeing and resilience to twice as many families and children in West Lothian by 2031*

*Compared to 2025

Drivers of Our Strategy

We are using driver diagrams and the associated improvement methodologies. These are a widely used improvement tool across healthcare, education, and public policy, particularly within NHS quality improvement, local authority change programmes, and Scottish Government-supported improvement frameworks. They are designed to clearly link strategic aims to the underlying factors that must change and the actions required to achieve them, supporting shared understanding and disciplined, measurable delivery.

Strategic Aim

We will deliver support to double the number of families from our 2024 baseline by 2031.

Primary Drivers

Meet the needs of families

Ensure families receive timely, responsive, and relevant support that reflects the complexity of their circumstances and helps prevent difficulties from escalating.

Expand geographical reach

Increase access to Home-Start support across West Lothian, with a particular focus on communities experiencing the greatest levels of disadvantage

Increase staff skill base, quality and number of volunteers

Strengthen the confidence, capability, and consistency of our staff and volunteers to support families with increasingly complex needs.

Become a leading partner who communicates effectively

Build trusted, visible partnerships that amplify the voices of families, improve collaboration, and position Home-Start West Lothian as a key preventative partner

Build our organisational capacity to support more families

Ensure sufficient people, funding and resources are in place to deliver high-quality support at greater scale over the life of the strategy.

Drivers of Our Strategy

Primary Driver

Meet the needs of families

Ensure families receive timely, responsive, and relevant support that reflects the complexity of their circumstances and helps prevent difficulties from escalating.

Secondary Drivers

Families will engage with support on a regular, consistent basis

Parents of neurodiverse neurodivergent children receive tailored, accessible provision

Supporting parents to understand and respond to their neurodivergent child's needs

Families have informal opportunities to connect and build peer support

Drivers of Our Strategy

Primary Driver

Secondary Drivers

Expand geographical reach

Increase access to Home-Start support across West Lothian, with a particular focus on communities experiencing the greatest levels of disadvantage

- Families in SIMD 1–3 communities are able to access local support from us
- Informal, drop-in provision is available within communities

Increase staff skill base and quality

Strengthen the confidence, capability, and consistency of our staff and volunteers to support families with increasingly complex needs.

- Staff and volunteers have the skills and confidence to support complex needs
- Quality assurance, learning and reflection are embedded within day-to-day practice
- The organisation consistently applies trauma-informed approaches

Drivers of Our Strategy

Primary Driver

Secondary Drivers

Become a leading partner who communicates effectively

Build trusted, visible partnerships that amplify the voices of families, improve collaboration, and position Home-Start West Lothian as a key preventative partner.

- Partner agencies and elected members understand and value Home-Start's role
- Strong relationships support joint working and shared outcomes

Build our organisational capacity to support more families

Ensure sufficient people and resources are in place to deliver high-quality support at greater scale over the life of the strategy.

- Sustainable funding enables long-term service delivery
- The organisation attracts and retains committed staff and volunteers who have access to continual development
- Systems, reporting and processes support effective use of resources

Measuring our success

Primary Drivers	Measure
Meet the needs of families Ensure families receive timely, responsive, and relevant support that reflects the complexity of their circumstances and helps prevent difficulties from escalating.	**We will support double the number of families from 2025 baseline by 2031.**
Expand geographical reach Increase access to Home-Start support across West Lothian, with a particular focus on communities experiencing the greatest levels of disadvantage	**We will develop a physical presence in 3 more locations across West Lothian**
Increase staff skill base and quality Strengthen the confidence, capability, and consistency of our staff and volunteers to support families with increasingly complex needs.	**100% of staff have the skills to deliver their role by 2031**
Become a leading partner who communicates effectively Build trusted, visible partnerships that amplify the voices of families, improve collaboration, and position Home-Start West Lothian as a key preventative partner	**We will triple engagement metrics across our web, social and email channels by 2031.**
Build our organisational capacity to support more families Ensure sufficient people and resources are in place to deliver high-quality support at greater scale over the life of the strategy.	**We will improve the unit cost of delivering services by 20% by 2031**

Conclusion

This strategy sets a clear direction for Home-Start West Lothian at a time of rising need and constrained public and third sector provision. It is grounded in what we know works: early, voluntary, relationship-based support that strengthens families before difficulties escalate. By focusing on the communities with the greatest disadvantage, building staff and volunteer capability, and deepening partnership working, we will increase our reach while protecting the quality and integrity of our support.

Our ambition to double the number of families we support by 2031 is achievable. It will be delivered through expanding accessible community provision, developing tailored responses to neurodiversity and behavioural challenges, embedding trauma-informed practice, and strengthening the systems that underpin sustainable delivery. We will measure success not only in growth, but in confidence, connection, and outcomes for families.

Above all, this strategy reaffirms our role within West Lothian's wider system of support. We do not replace statutory services; we strengthen the space before crisis. By remaining focused on prevention, partnership and trust, Home-Start West Lothian will continue to provide families with the practical help, relationships and belief they need to give their children the strongest possible start in life.

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