

# HOME-START

VOLUNTARY SUPPORT TO FAMILIES WITH  
SMALL CHILDREN

- Summary of Epinion's evaluation of Home-Start





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## HOME-START HELPS FAMILIES REGAIN CONTROL OF THEIR LIVES

**Epinion has evaluated Home-Start's contributions which help strained families with children to cope with everyday challenges, and the conclusion is undisputed: The efforts pay off. What starts with a helping hand for everyday errands results in peace and quiet, energy, happiness and self-confidence for the families.**

For a number of years, Home-Start has matched strained families with children with voluntary family friends who through everyday support can get these strained families back on track. Epinion's evaluation shows that the voluntary support initiates a process which gradually strengthens the families more and more. Simultaneously, voluntary family friends and the local authorities alike benefit from Home-Start's contributions.

The evaluation is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data which incorporates coordinators, voluntary family friends, families and local partners alike. The evaluation was completed by Epinion for Home-Start in the period from October 2013 to March 2014.

In international contexts, there is a range of research about Home-Start. The aim of this evaluation is to examine and document Home-Start's contributions and their effect in a Danish setting. With this publication it is our wish to share the evaluation results with collaborative partners as well as other players.

You are most welcome to contact us if you wish to know more about Home-Start and the evaluation.

Yours sincerely,

Lone Møller

Country Manager in Home-Start Family contact



## THE TYPICAL HOME-START PROCESS

The evaluation shows that the support processes run according to Home-Start's concept.

MONTH 1



A strained family with children is in need of support and contacts the local Home-Start coordinator.

The coordinator from the local Home-Start-department visits the family and enquires into the family's needs. Based on the family's wishes, the coordinator determines a good family friend match.



The family, the coordinator and the family friend meet for a match meeting in the family's home. The purpose of this meeting is for the family and the family friend to get a sense of one another, and typically both parties are allowed to "sleep on it" before they are to decide whether they are interested in the match.

The family friend visits the family approx. two hours/ week in which the family receives help to e.g. grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, conversing on big and small things, playing with the children and baby-sitting.



MONTH 6-12



When the family is ready to stand on its own feet (typically after 6-12 months), the official support is terminated and the family and the family friend decide whether they want to stay in personal contact.



## SUPPORT PROCESS ADJUSTED TO THE FAMILY'S

Home-Start's concept consists of minimum two hours' support once a week for at least six months. It is pivotal that it is the family itself who within this framework defines for what and how they want the support. The evaluation shows that the duration is a flexible guideline which is adjusted to the individual family's needs.

The support content is likewise adjusted to the family's needs and consequently varies from help with practical activities such as child care to conversation, social interaction and support in the development of parenting skills. In many support processes, a development takes place so that from being primarily of a practical nature the support later becomes more personal as a relationship of trust is gradually built between the family and the family friend.

Most often, the coordinator will terminate the process, but it is only finalised after a joint evaluation between coordinator, family friend and family. Approx. 50% of the families who have concluded their processes say that they remain in contact with the family friend outside the formal settings.

*"I know that it's supposed to end after half a year, but I sincerely hope that it gets prolonged — if not, I hope still to see her in less formal circumstances. I'm not sure that I can do without her now"*  
- Voluntary family friend

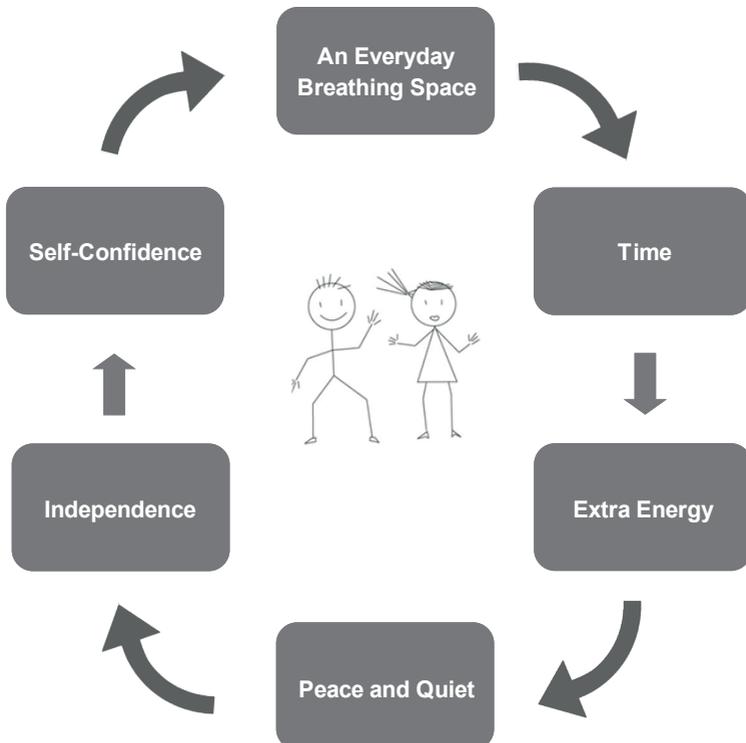
- 92% of the families receive support once a week
- 60% of the families receive 1-2 hours of support at a time while 38% receive 2 hours or more
- A support process lasts between 6 and 12 months. A typical support process lasts approx. 9 months



## THE GOOD CIRCLE

The evaluation shows that the impact of the support process develops over time, and in many families the process becomes a good circle which carries the potential to have a self-reinforcing effect.

What starts out as a breathing space in everyday life, embodied by the concrete time that the family receives from their voluntary family friend, quickly results in extra energy and peace and quiet for the family. As this gradually happens, the family starts to show more initiative. The increased independence and support from the family friend help strengthen the confidence of many parents; they experience that they can accomplish more on their own—all of which leads to more time, energy and peace and quiet.





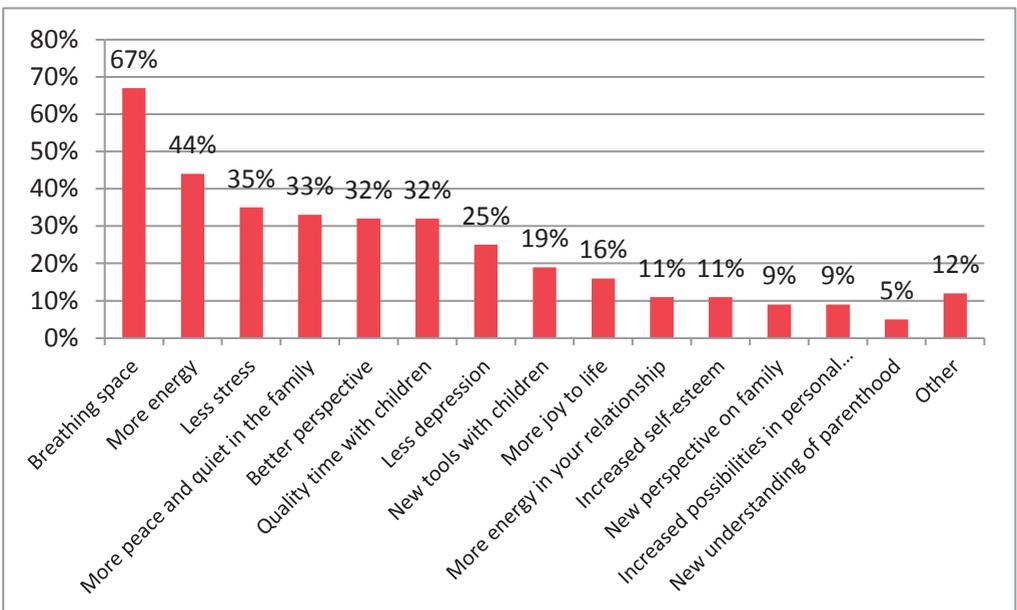
*"It has simply given me so much. It is difficult to describe in words what it exactly is, but our home is just much happier now. Personally, I have more energy now and I deal better with problems."*

- Family

*"I feel better and have made some changes in my work life [...] which means that I feel better and have more time and a greater wish to be close to the children. I felt inadequate before. Now that I feel better I can pass that on. That's a good circle to be in."*

- Family

Which immediate benefits do you feel that you get/got from the support you receive(d) from your family friend?





## THE IMPORTANCE OF HOME-START'S INVOLVEMENT

It is made probable that the Home-Start support in some families presumably will carry a decisive pre-emptive effect. Some examples tell of families in which parents on sick leave have returned to work or unemployed parents have gotten a job. Some families tell of stronger relationships and less conflicts; family friends tell of calm children who sleep better at night.

*"I felt that I was capable. It was a success for me. She had a lot of energy which rubbed off. It was a purely psychological factor knowing that she was there in case it all collapsed. She was there for me. She simply influenced us all greatly."*  
- Family

*"[The family friend] has saved my marriage. It has provided energy and balance. There's room to pass on energy. [...] We suddenly had time for each other and all the planning. Time to share some extra time together."*  
- Family

### Results and Effects

#### The Families – Short term perspective

A breathing space  
An extra hand  
Time

#### The Families – Medium term perspective

Peace  
Energy  
Independence  
Self-confidence

#### The Families – Long term perspective

Prevention of crises



## WHAT WORKS?

Besides the specific time that the families receive from their voluntary family friend, as well as the support which the time is spent on, the evaluation points to especially three elements of the contribution which have a positive influence on the results.

For **the strained families** it is beneficial that the support is performed on a voluntary basis and thus creates an equal situation in which the family does not have to care about how they are perceived and which consequences this may have. The flexible adjustment of the contribution to the individual family—including the carefully selected family/family friend match—means that the support is always appropriate and relevant for the family.

**The volunteers** emphasize the fact that it is a competent organisation with professionals, paid coordinators, trained volunteers and an experienced organisation which ensures the quality of the endeavour.

**The local partners** describe the pre-emptive effect of Home-Start as one of the pivotal reasons that they have chosen to co-operate with them. The interviewed persons in the partner municipalities experience that through the voluntary—and consequently equal—approach, Home-Start has a preventive effect for families who as yet are not a case for the municipality, but who have the potential to become one.

*"Some families have an inadequate network. The family may not be in a situation in which it is a social happening—that is they are not so far afield that it is becoming a social case, but they are strained when it comes to their current life situation. This is where Home-Start can reach some families who invite them into their home. We don't do that – we invite ourselves. Home-Start's efforts affect a preventive action which we as municipality cannot initiate, but which is very important".*

- Municipal player



## OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION RESULTS

<b>INPUT</b>	<p><b>Recruitment</b></p> <p>Networking and positioning of Home-Start in the local area. Co-operation with municipalities and others. Volunteers and families contact coordinator. Most frequent recruitment channel (families): Through local partners. Coordinator visits potential volunteers and families.</p>									
<b>CONTRIBUTION</b>	<p><b>Matching</b></p> <p>Time from first visit to matching: 0-5 months. Matching visits with the participation of family, family friend and coordinator. Balancing of expectations concerning the type of support.</p> <p><b>The support process</b></p> <p>Frequency: 92% once a week. Scope: 60% receive support 1-2 hours at a time, 28% for a longer period of time. Great variation in the content – tendency for development over time. Duration: 6-12 months, typically around 9 months.</p>									
<b>RESULTS AND EFFECTS</b>	<table border="1"><tr><td><p><b>The Families – Short term perspective</b></p><p>A breathing space An extra hand Time</p></td><td><p><b>The Families –Medium term perspective</b></p><p>Peace Energy Independence Self-confidence</p></td><td><p><b>The Families – Long term perspective</b></p><p>Prevention of crises</p></td></tr><tr><td colspan="3"><p><b>For the family friends</b></p><p>The experience of being able to pass on to families in need. The sense of being valuable.</p></td></tr><tr><td colspan="3"><p><b>For Home-Start</b></p><p>Positive publicity Visibility</p></td></tr></table>	<p><b>The Families – Short term perspective</b></p> <p>A breathing space An extra hand Time</p>	<p><b>The Families –Medium term perspective</b></p> <p>Peace Energy Independence Self-confidence</p>	<p><b>The Families – Long term perspective</b></p> <p>Prevention of crises</p>	<p><b>For the family friends</b></p> <p>The experience of being able to pass on to families in need. The sense of being valuable.</p>			<p><b>For Home-Start</b></p> <p>Positive publicity Visibility</p>		
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# EPINION

Epinion is the market leader within evaluations. We complete evaluations for Danish as well as international authorities and institutions, private companies and NGOs.

The evaluation design is developed and adapted to the individual task, and the key to success in our work is that it is reflective, documented and practicable.

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## About Home-Start

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In 1973, Home-Start was founded in England by Margaret Harrison. Since then the organisation's activities have expanded to a range of other countries around the globe, and in 2005/2006 a branch was established in Denmark. Home-Start is represented in more than 25 countries.

Home-Start offers support, friendship and practical everyday help to strained families with small children. The aid is offered on a voluntary basis by parents and other adults who have experience with children and families with children. As a starting point, the support always takes place in and around the families' home where the family related issues often occur, and because it is possible to respect and protect the families' dignity, identity and integrity within the household settings.

Evaluation can be found at [www.home-start.dk](http://www.home-start.dk)