

Katie's story: How the Toy Appeal helped me

The generous individuals who donate to Family Action's Toy Appeal make a huge difference to the lives of thousands of children nationwide. This is just one story that shows what the Toy Appeal has meant to mum Katie and her family

I've worked as a bartender for years and I love work - so much so that I was still working when I was heavily pregnant.

But after I had my daughter and took her home I started to struggle.

I was trying to work with a newborn baby at home and my boss told me I wasn't as reliable as before.

I understood but what they were saying was a little bit too honest and close to home.

But if it was difficult for me when I was working it became worse when I decided to leave work and become "just" a stay-at-home mum.

Don't get me wrong; I love being a mother, but I now realise I also need to get off my bum and work.

I think I might have had post-natal depression, looking back now, but as I was getting things back together my partner and I ended up having another child we hadn't planned for.

There were a lot of complications and I had to have manual hand turning and induction... which didn't seem to matter, as two days later I ended up having a C-section anyway!

It was tough and money was tight, and my partner and I split up about two years ago, just before the pandemic, although we'd been on and off for a while anyway.

I think I went a bit "funny" then with anxiety as the pandemic was kicking in... It just felt like I'd lost myself.

But throughout that time Family Action was there for me.

I first found out about the charity through attending the local pre-school which the charity runs, and which my neighbour recommended.

It was brilliant – the children were allowed to be children and weren't pressured into schoolwork and doing homework at a young age.

They learnt through play, weren't forced to do things they didn't want to do and the staff proceeded at my children's pace, and at MY pace – they always kept me informed.

Through talking to the staff, I shared that it was a struggle as I was living off universal credit and trying to keep the cupboards filled – which was difficult as I also have two adult sons who live at home and can't contribute much as they're in work training programmes, although they do try.

I was trying to be smart and shop in bulk but sometimes that wasn't possible.

They introduced me to Family Action's FOOD club, which helped me remove the stress that comes with thinking "oh my god, how am I going to feed the kids?".

It's brilliant.

You get 15 quid's worth of food for £3.50 and some weeks you get fantastic cakes and even flowers.

Even the "bad" weeks are good weeks, and you can't grumble as it is so handy.

Instead of worrying during the week I could look at the cupboards getting low and think "FOOD club. Friday." ... I love Family Action.

Because I knew the staff and everything's interlinked people suggested other things that might help me, so I then found out about the Toy Appeal, which supported me during the festive season.

I've always had fond memories of Christmas even though even though we didn't have much money when I was growing up.

There was one year that all we got were bath soaps, but it was still the best Christmas ever.

But these days it's different and I think in some ways we've sort of lost our way as a society.

People put it all over Facebook - "Look what I've got my kids" - and it makes you feel awful.

It should be about spending time with the family, but I do get really stressed because, even though my kids don't care what they get, I want to get them good presents.

The Toy Appeal relieves that little bit of stress.

I find the presents are usually educational or creative and last year my daughter got one of those aqua bead sets, which she loves but I hate as the little beads get everywhere.

So, yes, thank you Family Action for the extra cleaning!

But, seriously, that's how it should be – the mess is easily tidied up and they're not kids for long, so let them be kids.

The Toy Appeal means a lot to the families that haven't got a lot and especially the poor kids that haven't got anything.

Something so little can mean the world to them; It definitely means that to me.

Since the pandemic the Jobcentre helped me get some therapy and some medication and life seems to be going much more smoothly.

I've even gotten my job back at the bar, and I'm on good terms with the younger kids' father... we've got a really good relationship – now we're separated!

I feel like a different person from six months ago and I'm back doing the things I love, like singing and walking and dancing (I can't dance, but I don't care!).

I'm focusing on what I can see and taste and feel, and not what's troubling me.

It feels like I'm back: I'm me again.

If you think you would like to contribute to the Toy Appeal or would just like to find out more about how it works then why not [find out more?](#)