

Lifestart Foundation Annual Report 2021-2022



Growing Child The Programme for Parents



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Lifestart Foundation Ltd is a Company Limited by Guarantee, registered in Northern Ireland (Company No NI 41705) and a registered NI Charity (Charity No NIC100644)

Chairperson's Foreword

This year's Report highlights the continued good work of the Lifestart Foundation. We are particularly pleased at the successful completion of the SOOC (Shaping Ourselves and Our Children) Programme and commend our Partners and participants for their enthusiastic involvement throughout.

Our core activity in the delivery of the Growing Child Material has largely recovered. We fully appreciate the input of our Franchisees, funders and employees in the attainment of our Mission. Parenting is now more challenging in these times of economic hardship and despondency. Lifestart gives precious provision to parents yielding better outcomes for children and community.

Lifestart's other project deliveries are aptly covered in our Report and illustrate the scope, versatility and professionalism of our team.

I wish to acknowledge the dedication of my fellow directors. We record our appreciation for the inestimable contribution made by Mary McGowan to the Foundation.

Patrick Durkan
Chairperson
Lifestart

Purpose and Objectives

The mission of the Lifestart Foundation is to produce better child development outcomes by making available to parents evidence-based knowledge and information on how young children develop and learn and supporting parents in the use of this information in their parenting practice.

International research clearly demonstrates that good at-home parenting and a good home learning environment are central to ensuring good outcomes for children and that compromised parenting, whatever its cause, is a very serious child development risk factor. We in the Lifestart Foundation aim to provide parents of young children with high quality well-researched and up-to-date support relevant and appropriate to their needs as their children grow and develop. Our mission is implemented through the delivery of the *Growing Child*, an evidence-base child development programme specifically designed for parents delivered through a home visiting service and other group-based parenting programmes derived from the *Growing Child*. The beneficiaries of our work are parents and children, particularly the more vulnerable and, through them, the wider community and society. In this respect, the purpose of the Lifestart Foundation fulfils the requirements of the Charities Commission and the Trustees have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

The Lifestart Foundation delivers the *Growing Child* Programme and Home Visiting service in the Western, Southern and South-Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Areas of Northern Ireland and facilitates the delivery of the *Growing Child* programme elsewhere by making Social Franchise Agreements with other organisations; licensing them to deliver the *Growing Child* programme and Home Visiting Service. Foundation staff train, qualify and quality assure all Lifestart programme delivery staff wherever they work.

Current Social Franchisees are: the Dunluce Family Centre (Derry); Limavady Community Development Initiative; TinyLife (Northern Ireland); Lifestart Services Ltd (Donegal), Supporting Families Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan; the National Children's Network (Monaghan and Cavan); Carlow and Kilkenny Parents' Support

Programme; Drogheda Lifestart; Meath Springboard Family Support Services; Fledglings An Cosan (Tallaght, Dublin); Lifestart Mazabuka, Zambia; and Lifestart Bitola, North Macedonia.

The Board of the Lifestart Foundation in collaboration with Foundation staff and with other licensed Lifestart providers review the organisation's aims, objectives and activities each year to ensure that they remain focused on our stated purposes.

Our main objectives over the year 2021-2022 have been to:

- continue to implement our mission to improve child outcomes by educating and supporting parents in their parenting role
- support other organisations throughout the island of Ireland and elsewhere to deliver the Lifestart *Growing Child* Programme and Home Visiting Service
- continue to train and quality assure Lifestart delivery staff wherever they are working to ensure that parents always receive a top quality Lifestart service
- work to extend the direct delivery of Lifestart services in Northern Ireland and work with existing and new franchises to expand service delivery in Northern Ireland and in other regions
- deliver on service and tender contracts we hold with Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts
- complete the Shaping Ourselves and Our Children (SOOC) project and publicise project outcomes and impacts
- develop and deliver a specific programme response designed to meet the needs of parents and children affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath
- work to ensure the sustainability and resilience of the Lifestart Foundation into the future by acquiring the resources to develop and implement an organisational Succession Plan
- plan for a review and update of the *Growing Child* Programme
- work with other organisations to promote the important role of home visiting and home-base parenting support to improving outcomes for children
- Continue to strive to positively influence public policy in the interests of children and their families

Achievements and performance

In spite of the pandemic the Lifestart Foundation and its Social Franchise Partners continued to support more than 4,000 parents and their children throughout the course of the year.

While the home visiting service continued to be affected by the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Lifestart Foundation re-established the home visiting service as soon as it was deemed safe to do so and services have now returned to near normal. The Foundation has been able to continue to fully meet its contractual obligations to the Western Health and Social Care Trust and to the South-Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, reporting to the Trusts monthly on our work with families on the Ards peninsula and in Newtownards, County Down and in Counties Derry/Londonderry, Fermanagh and Tyrone. Throughout the year we continued to receive referrals to the service in the WHSCT area relating to highly vulnerable families either on the Child Protection Register or on the edge of children protection.

Through a tender with the EU funded Cross-border MACE Project we have also this year been delivering the *Growing Child* programme and Home Visiting Service to parents of children at risk of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in both the Western and the Southern Health and Social Care Trust areas.

The Foundation's Family Visitors have been involved over the year in a number of case conferences which have had very positive results for both parents and children.

Shaping Ourselves and Our Children (SOOC)

As well as individual support provided through the Home Visiting Service, we continued to deliver the SOOC programme until October 2021. *Shaping Ourselves and Our Children: Building the Foundations of good community relations in family life* (SOOC), was an innovative cross-border group-based parenting programme delivered from a good relations and cultural diversity perspective. The Programme was developed by the Lifestart Foundation in partnership with the Junction and

delivered through a partnership with four other organizations – the Dunluce Family Centre, SureStart Strabane (Barnardos), Lifestart Supporting Parents, Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan and Lifestart Services CLG, Donegal.

The SOOC Programme was aimed at improving community relations by working with parents, whose values, actions and parenting practices provide the foundations for child development across all developmental domains - physical, cognitive, emotional and social, including the child's sense of self and identity, child self-esteem, empathy and a respect for 'different others'. Research shows that parenting powerfully influences the status of identity development and that early life experiences and relationships are foundational to the development of emotional intelligence and social cognition i.e. how we process, store and apply information about other people, social situations and social attitudes and behaviours. Children learn by modelling and imitating the behaviour and the language of those closest to them and what and how they learn, consciously and unconsciously, shapes their sense of self and others.

Evidence shows that prejudicial attitudes and behaviours can manifest in early life and a sense of personal identity based on negative perceptions of 'different others' or, in the case of minority or excluded populations, of 'self', are both socially divisive and damaging to children's social and emotional development, self-esteem and resiliency. Children need to be encouraged and supported to understand their feelings and the needs and feelings of others, to understand how their actions can affect others, to appreciate differences between people and to develop a respect for difference. Parents are often unaware of how their own early life experiences influence their parenting practices and how their behaviour in the home and the Home Learning Environment they create impacts upon their children and through their children on the wider community and society.

As a result of many years of practice, working in the homes of families living in Northern Ireland and in the Border Counties of Ireland, the Lifestart Foundation and its partners are acutely aware of the inter-generational transmission of conflict-related trauma and exclusionary and divisive patterns of social and cultural reproduction, often reflective of and exacerbated by social and economic deprivation

and marginalisation and the impact of these processes on the lives of parents and their children. We have long recognised the consequences of conflict, violence and trauma and social exclusion and prejudice, often rooted in the parents' past, for child outcomes and their impact on children in the present and in the future, unless this negative and developmentally damaging inter-generational cycle is broken. We recognised the need to develop a universal intervention specifically designed to address parenting and child development from a diversity perspective and to develop this intervention with the help of specialists in the field of community relations education and peace building.

Developing and delivering the SOOC programme profoundly benefited the 1770 parents who participated in it and the more than 3000 children affected by it. An additional 178 people also benefitted from stand-alone events over the course of the project bringing the total number of beneficiaries to 1948 adults (and their children). The evaluative evidence gathered during the course of the project clearly shows that it met its aim of raising parental knowledge of and respect for social and cultural diversity and supported parents to create Home Learning Environments conducive to the promotion in children of a healthy and positive sense of self and identity that is open to, respects and values difference and diversity.

The data also strongly suggests that the project met its objectives of enabling practitioners to work on a cross-border basis to improve parenting skills and Home Learning Environments and improved their knowledge and informed their practice in relation to social and cultural diversity and child development. In fact the evidence suggests that the impact of SOOC on parenting support practitioners (facilitators) was profound and much greater than expected. SOOC equipped them with the appropriate resources and tools to enable parents: to reflect on and explore the legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland and existing cultural knowledge, values and parenting practices; to share cultural knowledge and experiences of home and community life and to value and create good Home Learning Environments.

SOOC raised parents' awareness of their role, values and practices in the creation of the Home Learning Environment and the impact of that environment on child

outcomes and on how children and young people self-regulate and view and interact with one another and the social world.

It facilitated and supported structured and focused interaction between parents from different social backgrounds leading to greater cultural knowledge, understanding and empathy; And supported parents to co-operate on a cross-community and cross-border basis to influence policies on parenting and on peace-building to include a greater recognition of the role of the family in shaping children's social attitudes and capacities to empathise with others and to deal with diversity and difference.

In meeting these objectives, the SOOC project had the expected impacts on parents/caregivers and practitioners; impacts that will produce better outcomes among the children of programme participants, thereby contributing towards a more peaceful and inclusive society.

An interim report on the SOOC project was prepared and presented at the end of Project Conference, attended by key stake holders, family support practitioners and health and social care professionals, held in the City of Derry-Londonderry in September 2021. Guest speakers included Ministers Gary Middleton and Declan Kearney from the Executive Office Northern Ireland, Dr Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, Ireland, Professor Siobhan O'Neill, Mental Health Sciences Ulster University, Northern Ireland and Gina McIntyre, CEO of the Special EU Programmes Body. Minister Humphreys from the Department of Community and Rural Development, Ireland provided her warmest congratulations through video link. Key achievements of the project and a documentary video were shared with delegates on the day.

Learning from SOOC was shared an international PINN Erasmus programme hosted by the Prevention and Early Intervention Network that showcased positive approaches to parenting. The Pregnancy and Early Childhood, Preparing for Parenting Event resulted in a video outlining the work by Lifestart and SOOC during the pandemic.

A full evaluation report on the project was completed in November 2021 and disseminated among all relevant networks in Ireland and NI and CYPN (Children and Young People Now) the professional publication for the children's sector in the UK conducted a case study of the SOOC programme disseminating information on the project and its outcomes throughout the rest of the UK.



We look forward to the launch of the EU Peace Plus fund to which we plan to submit an application to advance and further develop the very positive work begun on the SOOC project.

New Lifestart Franchisees

The report of the evaluation conducted by Queens University of the very successful 5 year partnership project between the Lifestart Foundation and Tinylife, a NI based charity specialising in supporting the families of pre-term children, was launched in September 2021. The TinyStart Project was funded by the Big Lottery to deliver Tinylife services and the Lifestart *Growing Child* programme and Home-Visiting Service to the parents of pre-term children in Northern Ireland. As a result of the project 66 families completed the Lifestart *Growing Child* programme and

participated in the range of services provided by Tynylife including General Information Sessions, Parent Support Groups, Home-based Volunteer Support, Baby Sensory Sessions, Baby Massage Courses and individual Family Support.

The project helped to alleviate parent anxiety, worries and concerns, provided much need re-assurance and support, guided parents on how best to support their child's development, promoted parent/child attachment and bonding and helped parents to create an effective Home Learning Environment; all factors which have been empirically proven to generate good child development outcomes. By delivering the *Growing Child* programme according to the child's developmental rather than chronological age, the project allowed for programme adaptation focused on the individual child's development needs and further reassured parents that what they were doing contributed their child's development. Parents really appreciated the support provided by the project at a critical time when faced with the task of nurturing a pre-mature and often sick child and were thrilled when children reached their developmental milestones, many in the first year and the majority by year two of the programme.

As a result of the TinyStart project Tynylife has now taken out a Lifestart Social Franchise Licence with the Foundation and in June 2021 Foundation staff trained and equipped Tynylife family support staff to deliver the *Growing Child* programme and Home Visiting Service. Tynylife also recently successfully acquired funding to employ specialised family visiting staff who will be trained by the Foundation in September/October of this year.

Meath Springboard Family Support Services, an Ireland based family support organisation providing a range of family support services and parenting programmes, also this year took up a Lifestart franchise and we trained and equipped Springboard staff in September/October 2021 to deliver the programme and service. Hence the Growing Child Programme and Home Visiting Service is now included in the menu of services the organisation offers parents and children.

Smile Baby Programme

Very many families have continued to experience additional problems as a result of the Covid health crisis impacting, in particular, on children's social and emotional development and communication skills. In the course of the year the Foundation acquired funding from the RTE Toy Show Fund, managed in Northern Ireland by the Community Foundation to develop a post-pandemic group-based parenting programme, the 'Smile Baby Project' which we will be delivering until December 2022. To date we have delivered 13 Smile Baby Programmes, involving a total of 52 sessions delivered to 122 parents and 139 children. Five programmes were delivered in County Derry-Londonderry, four in Tyrone, two in Down, one in Antrim and one in Fermanagh. We have eleven more programmes scheduled over the coming weeks. Parent and children's organisations and community groups have been slowly opening up again after the Covid crisis so we have had to work hard to get organisations to host programmes. Many have only recently begun to bring parents and children back into premises and to offer face-to-face programmes and services. But the need for group-based parenting support is clearly there and is increasing given post-Covid inflationary conditions. Parents have really appreciated the opportunity to meet in groups, to articulate and discuss their issues and concerns, to learn more about child development and to gain advice and support. Feedback on the programme is excellent and demand among parents is high.



Networking and Policy

Lifestart staff members continue to be actively involved in strategic networks and systems at Local, Regional, National, European and international levels, and continue to participate in and present at national and international conferences on the role of Lifestart in supporting parents and improving child outcomes. This year we were represented at number of relevant on-line events. The Lifestart Foundation and its partners continue to act to influence policy on children and families in Ireland, the UK and Europe. We remain an active member of Eurochild, The CRNINI (Children's Research Network Ireland and NI), the Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN), the Early Intervention Foundation, The Early Years Advisory Group, the Parenting Network, Children's Rights Alliance, Early Childhood Ireland and the Trauma Informed Cross Border Network.

The Home Visiting Alliance

The Lifestart Foundation is a founding member of the Home Visiting Alliance. The Alliance, established in November 2021 is a collaboration of five evidence-based early childhood home visiting programmes: Lifestart, Preparing for Life, ParentChild+, Community Mothers and Infant Mental Health. The Alliance, Chaired by Josephine Bleach, represents the collective national voice of home visiting. It is a space where representatives of each home visiting programme meet to pursue opportunities to inform policymakers, decision-makers, stakeholders, and the media about the positive impact of home visiting on children, parents and families.

While recognising that each programme has its own mechanisms and structures, the Alliance's focus is on promoting common messages about home visiting and addressing cross-programme issues in a systematic coherent and collaborative way.

Our aims are to:

- Promote home visiting as an essential early years vital service for children, parents and families
- Support member organisations, collectively and individually, to strengthen and broaden the impact of home visiting in Ireland

- Contribute to policy development and implementation in relation to home visiting and parenting support locally, nationally and internationally.
- Share our common learning at programme, approach, implementation and policy levels.

The Alliance this year acquired funding from the What Works Learning Together Fund that allowed it to run a series of information and training webinars for Alliance member organisations' staff and key public sector and other stakeholders and we are collaborating with other member organisations to acquire the resources to continue to promote home visiting as a key children and family service and to provide additional training opportunities for our staff.

We are currently working on setting up an Alliance website and are working with the What Works Project to gather information and feedback from member organisations to feed into government discussions on a national model for home visiting in Ireland.

Strategic Planning

Finally this year we have revised and updated our strategic plan and we are currently working on a Succession Plan aimed at ensuring that the Lifestart Foundation has the leadership and governance structure that will sustain and develop the organisation into the future. We have successfully applied to NI Dormant Accounts for funding to implement the Succession Plan which will be a key feature of our activities in the coming year.

Plans for 2022-2023

Our key priorities in the coming year are to:

- review our governance structure and draw up a Governance Plan
- draw up a Leadership Succession Plan
- review and update the *Growing Child* programme in accordance with the latest research in child development and parenting

- review and refresh the Lifestart brand building on its reputation for trust and credibility
- review and update the Foundation's website and social media presence to promote better communications and brand awareness
- draw up and submit a successful Peace Plus application for the extension of the SOOC1 programme throughout NI and the Border Counties and the development and implementation of SOOC2 programme

Thanks

We thank all those who contributed to the Lifestart Mission and especially our funders, without whom Lifestart programmes and services would not be available to parents and their children. We thank the Western Health and Social Care Trust; the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SureStart Ards); the Southern Health and Social Care Trust; the Big Lottery; Belfast Sit Out (St Anne's Cathedral); the Halifax Foundation; NIE Employees; the Souter Trust; TBF Thompson Trust; Ulster Bank Employees; HDH Willis; Enkalon; the Hedley Foundation; Esme Mitchell; Danske Bank Employees; Dormant Accounts NI; and the EU Peace IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body, as well as the many other funders who support the work of Lifestart Franchisees.

We thank all those who work in the Lifestart family, in a paid or voluntary capacity, for their commitment, diligence and creativity in interpreting and implementing the Lifestart mission to improve outcomes for children and we thank our professional colleagues in the statutory sector with whom we work to achieve shared goals. We give a special thank you this year to the SOOC team and our partners on the project, who worked so hard to deliver this highly innovative and very successful programme and to the SEUPB team, especially Kenda Someville who supported us throughout the project.

We thank the parents and children who throughout the year participated in the *Growing Child* Programme, the SOOC Project and other Lifestart programmes and services and we wish you the very best for the future.

Appendix 1

Lifestart Council (Board of Management) Members

P. Durkan	Chairperson
U. Birthistle	Vice-chair
M. Wrynn	
M. McReynolds	

Non-voting Members

S. O' Callaghan	Company Secretary
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Lifestart Foundation Staff

Dr P. McClenaghan	Executive Director
E. Holmes	Administrator
P. Buchanan	Family Visitor
L. Wilson	Family Visitor
L. Patterson	Family Visitor
C. Ward	Family Visitor
M. Holmes	SOOC Project Coordinator
V. Keenan	SOOC Project Support Worker
S. Boyle	SOOC Recruitment Officer

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Appendix II

Lifestart Franchise Holders

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Lifestart Foundation Limited

Issue 32

More than a few parents have expressed their feelings about their child by saying:

"I wish I knew what to do about my child's behaviour."

It would be nice to have a simple solution - like a magic wand for parents to use when they feel frustrated by their child's behaviour!

Issue 30

Many people who study and work with young children agree that the period around two and a half years of age can be very exasperating. You are no doubt finding it also to be one of the funniest. Just hold on to your sense of humour and patience, and both you and your child will weather this stormy period successfully.

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