

LIFESTART FOUNDATION LIMITED

TRUSTEES' REPORT (INCLUDING DIRECTORS' REPORT)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2023

The Trustees present their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2023.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note to the financial statements and comply with the charity's [governing document], the Companies Act 2006 and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102)" (effective 1 January 2019).

Objectives and activities

The purpose of the company 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. The purpose 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 Board of the Lifestart Foundation in collaboration with Foundation staff 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 have been to:

- continue to implement our mission to improve child outcomes by educating and supporting parents in their parenting role
- continue to deliver local parenting support services aimed at improving child development outcomes
- deliver on service and tender contracts we hold with Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Trusts
- continue to train and quality assure Lifestart delivery staff wherever they are working to ensure that parents always receive a top quality Lifestart service
- continue to deliver the group Smile Baby programme 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 implementing the organisation's Succession Plan
- acquire the resources needed to continue the Foundation's core work
- review and update the Growing Child Programme
- support other organisations throughout the island of Ireland and elsewhere to deliver the Lifestart Growing Child Programme and Home Visiting Service
- 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

Who uses and benefits from the services of the Charity?

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. 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 charity fulfils the requirements of the Charities Commission.

The Trustees have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

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Achievements and performance

Over the last 12 months Lifestart Foundation staff have delivered 1,800 home visits and 26 group-based parenting programmes supporting in total just under 1,000 families in Northern Ireland. The Foundation has also supported the work of other organisations delivering Lifestart Services to a further 3,000 parents and children.

The Foundation has continued to meet its contractual obligations to the Western Health and Social Care Trust and to the South-eastern Health and Social Care Trust, delivering the home visiting service to 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 on the Child Protection Register or on the edge of children protection. With the agreement of the Trust we began this year to accept referrals for Level 2 families from health visitors as well as from social workers, and the number of referrals received throughout the year has increased. Our staff report back to Trust professionals, attend family case conferences and review meetings, make regular presentations to professional staff teams on our work and host site visits by social work and health visiting students which helps to increase awareness of the service and its beneficial impact on parents and children.

We also delivered the 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 funded through a tender with the EU funded Cross-border MACE Project. The MACE project ended in March 2023 and the Lifestart team was congratulated by representatives of both Trusts on their important contribution to the Project. An impact measure developed in collaboration with the South-eastern Trust was piloted with the MACE families and was subsequently adopted for use to measure the impact of the Lifestart programme with all families receiving the home visiting service. Results indicate that all parents receiving the home visiting service feel the service has helped them in their parenting role, 97% that it increased their awareness of key child development issues, 97% that it helped them to bond with their child, 100% that it improved parent/child communication, 97% that it enabled them to shape their child's behaviour and to promote child self-esteem and 92% that it helped them to promote child empathy.

As well as individual support provided through the home visiting service, we delivered a further 26 group-based post-covid parenting programmes. The 'Smile Baby Programme' is funded by the RTE Toy Show Fund, managed in Northern Ireland by the Community Foundation which has agreed an extension to the project until March 2024. Parents who have participated in the Smile Baby Programme indicated their appreciation of the opportunity to meet in groups, to articulate and discuss their parenting issues and concerns, to learn more about child development and to gain advice and support. Feedback on the programme has been excellent and demand among parents continues to be high.

In the course of the year we acquired funds from the Big Lottery Awards for All for the Bump, Baby and Beyond Project aimed at training and equipping our staff to deliver 'Doula' informed services to new and expectant parents. Our staff have applied what they have learned through the Doula training in the delivery of Lifestart Programmes and Services and will in the coming year be working to develop a new Bump, Baby and Beyond group-based parenting programme.

Through the delivery of our group parenting programmes we have cemented good working relationships with the many organisations that have hosted our programmes, including Eglinton Community Hall, HomeStart Ards, Oak Healthy Living, SureStart Cookstown, Curryneiran Community Centre, Oasis Antrim Community Hub, Strabane SureStart, SureStart Magheraelt, Omagh County Primary School, Shepherd's View, Support 2gether, Omagh Community House, Dry Arch SureStart, Newtownards SureStart, East Belfast SureStart, Colin Glen Library, Ballybeen Women's Centre, Rainbow Early Years Centre, LAST Sure Start, NCB and the Rural Community Network.

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.

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As a founding member of the Home Visiting Alliance, we worked with partners in the Alliance this year to run a series of information and training webinars for Alliance member staff and commissioned a Feasibility Study of Home Visiting in Ireland. The Feasibility Study will be officially launched at the PEIN (Prevention and Early Intervention Network) national conference in September of this year. The Foundation is also providing evidence to a study being conducted by the UNITES Team at Maynooth University on home visiting in Ireland. This research has been commissioned by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) with the goal of developing standardised approaches to home visiting in Ireland.

Finally, this year we have begun to implement, through funding from Dormant Accounts NI, the Foundation's 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. To oversee the implementation of the plan we appointed an Interim Manager whose duties include: reviewing the statement of responsibilities of board members and office bearer roles, induction procedures and governance handbook; managing the Growing Child programme review process and overseeing the implementation of the recommendations of the Expert Review Panel; reviewing and updating the Foundation's website, social media presence, promotional materials and communications; working with the Board to draw up a marketing plan for the Growing Child materials and to source further funding.

Financial review

Total income for the year was £241,565, of which £192,833 was generated from charitable activities, £13,968 from donations and legacies and £16,218 from other trading activities. The charity also received £18,546 in respect of gift aid payments from Lifestart Resources, a trading subsidiary of the charity.

Total expenditure by the charity was £226,843. £216,091 of this was incurred undertaking activities that further our charitable aims for the benefit of our beneficiaries. Other costs incurred amounted to £10,752. Other losses in the amount of £1,878 represent foreign exchange losses on translation of Euro bank balances to the presentational currency Pounds Sterling.

The balance on total funds at the year-end was £217,229, of which £86,854 were unrestricted, £56,781 were designated and £73,594 were restricted.

Reserves Policy

The Trustees consider it prudent to hold monies in reserve in the event that unforeseen circumstances should lead to financial difficulties which might put the future of its employment capacity, general charitable work and property in jeopardy.

The Trustees have examined the charity's requirements for reserves in light of the main risks to the organisation and established a formal policy which stipulates that free reserves be maintained at a level which ensures that the charity's core activity could continue during a period of unforeseen difficulty. Free reserves are defined by the Trustees as unrestricted income funds freely available for use as the charity so determines and thereby excludes any funds committed, invested in tangible fixed assets held by the charity and restricted or designated funds.

The Trustees' policy is that unrestricted funds which have not been designated for a specific use should be maintained at a level equivalent to between three and six month's expenditure. The Trustees considers that reserves at this level will ensure that, in the event of a significant drop in funding, they will be able to continue the charity's current activities while consideration is given to ways in which additional funds may be raised. Based on 2022/23 expenditure (excluding depreciation) of £224,391 the target level of reserves is £56,100 to £112,200. Free reserves as at 31st March 2023 are £85,350. The Trustees continue to strive to build and maintain a general level of reserves in accordance with the upper level of the target so that they will be able to continue the current activities of the charity.

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Plans for future periods

Our key priorities in the coming year are to:

- Fully implement our Succession Plan
- Review and update our Strategic Plan
- Draw up a Foundation Marketing Plan
- Acquire the resources to develop and deliver the Bump, Baby and Beyond Programme
- Draw up and submit a successful Peace Plus Application
- Acquire the resources to ensure the continuance and sustainability of our work to support parents and children

Structure, governance and management

Governing document

Lifestart Foundation Limited is a company limited by guarantee and accepted as charitable by HMRC under reference XR 47557. The company was incorporated on 8th October 2001. The company was established under a Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the company, and is governed by its Articles of Association. The liability of members is limited in that every member of the company undertakes to contribute an amount not exceeding £1 in the event of the company being wound up.

The Trustees, who are also the directors for the purpose of company law, and who served during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were:

Patrick Durkan (Chairperson)

Ursula Birthistle

Maire McReynolds

Mary McGowan

(Resigned 25 May 2023)

Mairead Wrynn

Dr Eileen Doherty

(Appointed 25 May 2023)

Maureen Heatherington

(Appointed 28 July 2023)

Recruitment and appointment of the Trustees

Under the requirements of the Memorandum and Articles of Association unless otherwise determined by the company in General Meeting the number of Trustees shall not be less than four. Trustees are elected to serve only until the next Annual General Meeting at which they shall then be eligible for re-election.

In the financial year there were no changes to the Board of Trustees. The Board as a whole was approved by the AGM and continues to monitor its membership.

Risk Management

The Trustees are aware of the major risks to which the charity is exposed. Where appropriate, systems or procedures have been established to mitigate the risks the charity faces. Internal control risks are minimised through the procedures for authorisation of all transactions and projects. Procedures are in place to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations. These procedures are reviewed periodically to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the charity.

Organisation Structure

The Board of Trustees consists of six members who administer the charity. The Trustees are responsible for the strategic direction and policy of the organisation. The Trustees are from a variety of professional backgrounds relevant to the work of the charity.

All members of the Board of Trustees give their time voluntarily and receive no benefits from the charity. Any expenses reclaimed from the charity are set out in the notes to the financial statements.

A scheme of delegation is in place and responsibility for the provision of services rests with the Foundation's Executive Director, who is responsible for the day to day operational management of the charity.

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Statement of Trustees' responsibilities

The Trustees, who are also the directors of Lifestart Foundation Limited for the purpose of company law, are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

Company Law requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that year.

In preparing these financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operation.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The Trustees' report was approved by the Board of Trustees.

Patrick Durkan (Chairperson)

Trustee

15 November 2023