



14<sup>th</sup> August 2024

## Trustee annual report

Reporting period: October 2022 to October 2023.

### Overview

Penuel Children's Foundation (<https://www.penuelchildren.com/>) is a charity registered with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (registered charity number 101028). Since 2013 we have been working to relieve poverty and hardship among children by providing education, healthcare, food, and shelter.

We have done this principally through our support for Mhlali Children's Haven in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. However, in recent months we have also been supporting the work of 'Starfish Soul Care', a project started by two of Penuel's Trustees to provide physical, emotional and spiritual rest, support and nurture for foster and adoptive families based in Northern Ireland. Accordingly, with the consent of the Charity Commission, we have amended the Charity's trust deed to allow the promotion of health and wellbeing not only for children but for those who care for them, through retreats and therapeutic services for families.

People donating to Penuel Children's Foundation can now choose to give to our general fund, or earmark the funds for either Mhlali Children's Haven or Starfish Soul Care. Of course, all funds already donated for Mhlali will continue be used for that purpose.

Below, we set out the work completed by Mhlali Children's Haven and then by Starfish Soul Care.

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### Mhlali Children's Haven

We continue to support the work of Mhlali Children's Haven in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. This is a family-centred haven for children who have been orphaned, and those from backgrounds of abuse, abandonment or neglect – often with long-term physical or emotional difficulties. Working hand in hand with the South African Department of Social Development (SADSD), and other child protection organisations, the haven welcomes, loves and cares for each child until they are safely established in a family or other place of long-term care. Mhlali have extended their work to support women referred by social services with crisis pregnancies, providing temporary support and accommodation (in 'Sharon's House') until mother and child were able to return to the community. Local oversight is provided by Penuel

Children's Foundation South Africa, a registered Nonprofit Organisation (181- 800 NPO) and Public Benefit Organisation (REF: 930050398).

As an example of the work of Mhlali Children's Haven, we report on their activity from October 2022 to October 2023.

### **Children's work**

Mhlali provided 24/7 temporary safe care (emergency care due to children being abused/abandoned/neglected) for 14 children, from new-born up to two years. Of these children:

- Ten received antiretroviral drugs as prophylaxis for HIV.
- Fourteen were vaccinated.
- Five were treated for malnutrition.
- Two received physiotherapy for suspected cerebral palsy.

Over the reporting period five children were adopted, one child was placed with a longer-term foster family and, in partnership with SADSD, one child was reunited with their family. Very sadly, one child passed away with sudden infant death syndrome. This distressing event was formally investigated by the coroner and the ACVV Child Protection Agency and the death recorded as natural and unavoidable. Although staff and management were commended for their rapid and appropriate response, Mhlali carried out an internal audit and as a result, all staff and management attended a first responder course that was specifically tailored to their needs.

### **Sharon's house**

Sharon's House provided care for 16 women with crisis pregnancies, nine of whom had suffered gender-based violence. Over the reporting period 16 mothers gave birth, with eleven babies remaining with their biological mother, and five babies consented for adoption, in cooperation with SADSD. However, despite this good work, the Covid Pandemic caused disruption to the partnerships we had in place for aftercare for mothers and their children, so we have reluctantly closed Sharon's House for the foreseeable future.

### **Staff**

Mhlali employed six local staff members, all of whom received in-house training. One staff member was made redundant due to the closer of Sharon's House but we were able to secure comparable work in a local NGO for this staff member.

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## **Starfish Soul Care**

Starfish Soul Care began as a pilot project in April 2022, aiming to provide physical, emotional and spiritual, rest, support and nurture to foster and adoptive families. Starfish provides 'soul care' retreats including day retreats and residential weekends for families in Northern Ireland. Retreats are bespoke and therapeutic with the hope that all foster and adoptive families feel welcome and included, whatever their make-up and wherever they are on their journey. We operate from an inter-denominational Christian ethos but families from all religious backgrounds (or none) are welcomed. Starfish Soul Care became an official

project of Penueel Children's foundation in Dec 2022 and had a public launch in Belfast in November 2023.

As an example of the work of Starfish Soul Care, we report on their activity from October 2022 to October 2023.

Over this period, Starfish provided one full weekend residential, two social events for foster and adoptive families, and two therapeutic family soul care day retreats, with locations in Castlewellan, Comber, Limavady, and Belfast. Total attendance comprised 87 adult foster carers/adoptive parents, 76 children (age 0-10), and 29 youth.

#### **October 2022: Therapeutic residential weekend**

This weekend was attended by 14 families comprising 23 adult foster carers/adoptive parents, 23 children (age 0-10), and six youth.

#### **December 2022: Nativity themed social at a local farm**

This was attended by nine families, comprising 14 adult foster carers/adoptive parents, 14 children (age 0-10), and three youth.

#### **February 2023: Therapeutic soul care retreat**

This was attended by seven families, comprising 14 adult foster carers/adoptive parents, 11 children (age 0-10), and seven youth.

#### **July 2023: Therapeutic soul care retreat**

This was attended by 11 families, comprising 23 adult foster carers/adoptive parents, 23 children (age 0-10), and six youth.

#### **Staffing/volunteers**

Starfish soul care is 100% volunteer-run, with support from 25 volunteers throughout the year. Penueel Trustees Alex and Keely Mosley take the lead facilitator roles. They are both professionally trained and qualified therapists and foster carers and adopters themselves with over 20 years of experience working with vulnerable children, young people and the families who care for them. Finance and governance are managed by the Penueel Trustee Board.