

LIFESTART FOUNDATION LTD

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

2005/2006

Annual Report



Lifestart Foundation

- educating parents, developing children

Mission Statement

Educating and empowering parents of children from birth to the age of five
so that these children are enabled to reach their full potential

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Foundation Staff would like to thank the Foundation's Board of Directors/Lifestart Council -

Patrick Durkan, Chairperson & Treasurer

Maura Ward, Vice Chairperson

Gemma Duffy, Secretary

Neil Barr

Mairead Wrynn

Michael McMonagle

- for their steadfast voluntary commitment and support throughout the year.

We would also like to thank Dolores Mc Guinness, former Executive Director of the Lifestart Foundation, for her help and guidance.

CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

On behalf of the Lifestart Foundation, I thank you for your interest in Lifestart. I thank everyone in attendance, especially those who have travelled some distance.

I welcome especially our guest speakers, Alison Loughlin of the NI Parenting Forum, Tim Hobbs of the Dartington Social Research Unit and Dennis Dunn. As Lifestart enters its 21st year, it is particularly appropriate and significant to have Dennis with us today. His wisdom and support, together with that of his predecessors, has been truly integral and essential to Lifestart.

The past year has been a year of considerable change within the Foundation, with a new Chairperson and also a new Executive Director, Pauline McClenaghan. Pauline, together with our Foundation staff, Loreto, Matt and Sean has worked superbly throughout the year. The National Office has performed excellently.

Our quality Lifestart delivery, throughout Ireland, in Macedonia and Zambia, bears testimony to the unstinting efforts and energy of Management Committees, Co-ordinators, Family Visitors and Administration personnel. The Lifestart Mission is being achieved through so many valued people. It is imperative that we continue to develop and foster relationships with agencies to influence policies and promote working solutions that make a better life for our children. Development can bring change and such change is a challenge that must be faced positively.

The Lifestart Foundation is indebted to all of its funders for their wisdom and financial input. This funding has improved the lot of so many in our care over the past 21 years.

Finally, I would like to record my appreciation to Gemma, Mairead, Maura, Michael and Neil, all fellow trustees in the Foundation, who hold the Lifestart Mission in their heart, and give freely of their time and expertise.








Patrick Durkan
Chairperson
Lifestart Foundation

Introduction

The Lifestart programme is a parent-directed child-centred structured curriculum of information and practical learning activity on child development – the ‘Growing Child’¹ – delivered to parents of children aged from birth to five years. Provision is organised and managed through community-based projects and the curriculum is delivered by trained family visitors in the parent’s own home - the primary environment for education and development in the crucial first five years of a child’s life, where children develop and learn - physically, emotionally, intellectually and socially - and where future learning and development potential and capacities are structured and set.

The Lifestart Foundation is a company limited by guarantee the primary function of which is to establish and license locally based and managed Lifestart projects to implement the Lifestart programme throughout Ireland and to support the establishment of Lifestart projects overseas. The Foundation is managed by a voluntary Board of Directors, the Lifestart Council, and currently has twenty-one affiliated projects employing 183 people: nineteen projects in Ireland delivering the programme to the parents of more than 3,000 children and two projects abroad, in Zambia and in Macedonia, delivering Lifestart services to over 13,000 children.

The responsibilities of the Foundation are:

-  To act as brand copyright/franchise holder and to protect the copyright materials as required by the publishers
-  To develop curriculum
-  To quality assure programme content and delivery
-  To enter into contractual relations with relevant government bodies and other NGOs
-  To ensure that programme staff are trained and accredited
-  To inform and influence government policy
-  To determine strategic direction and devise, oversee and monitor the implementation of Lifestart strategic plans

¹ Growing Child Inc. US

- 🌐 To develop, implement and monitor organisational policies and accountability and reporting systems and procedures
- 🌐 To develop and implement a funding strategy aimed at organisational sustainability
- 🌐 To manage the longitudinal evaluation of the impact of Lifestart
- 🌐 To promote and market the Lifestart brand

Throughout the year the staff of the Foundation, directed and supported by the Council, have committed themselves to implementing and progressing the strategic goals of the Foundation outlined in its 2004-2007 Strategic Plan:

- Expand Lifestart delivery
- Facilitate the evaluation and assessment of programme impact
- Manage the Lifestart Foundation efficiently and effectively
- Underpin programme delivery by professional training and accreditation
- Integrate the Lifestart programme into mainstream early years and family support programmes

Within this context the key areas of work undertaken throughout the year were:

- Supporting and collaborating with the Lifestart National Office in Sligo
- Providing support to existing Lifestart Projects and identifying and facilitating expansion opportunities
- Working to rationalise and standardise Lifestart policies and procedures
- Providing training and accreditation for Lifestart Staff
- Contributing to policy development and raising Lifestart's profile among senior staff in relevant Government Departments and among other key stakeholders
- Facilitating the longitudinal evaluation of programme impact
- Following up funding opportunities and exploring the development of organisational structures appropriate to future growth and sustainability

Lifestart National Office

The Lifestart National Office (NO) is a registered company with charitable status, managed by a local Board of Directors, with responsibilities specifically for Lifestart Projects in the Republic of Ireland.

The NO is formally affiliated to the Lifestart Foundation through an annual Contract and Affiliation Agreement (CAA) based on the submission by the National Office of a yearly action plan and quarterly progress reports related to its main areas of responsibility which include:

- Ensuring the delivery of the Lifestart Programme as agreed by the Lifestart Council
- Implementing training and accreditation
- Research into relevant statutory policies
- Implementing project reviews
- Promotion and marketing
- Networking, sharing information and learning, working with Community and other stakeholders

The Foundation has worked closely with the National Office, supporting and collaborating with NO Directors and staff as appropriate. Representatives of the Council and the NO Board of Directors met on two occasions this year to discuss the NO Action Plan and the Council's long-term proposals for Lifestart growth and development and regular meetings have taken place between staff members of the Foundation and National Offices to work on issues of mutual concern.

Staff have worked together to take forward the rationalisation and standardisation agenda with local project co-ordinators/managers and facilitated focus group sessions with co-ordinators, conducted by the research team at the Institute of Child Care Research at Queens University, as part of the research for the longitudinal evaluation.

The Foundation continues to support the NO in their work with projects, assisting in negotiations regarding contracts and affiliation and providing training for new project Co-ordinators and the Foundation congratulates NO staff on the establishment of two new projects this year - Lifestart Mulhuddart and Lifestart Carlow/Kilkenny.

In its role as the accreditation centre for Lifestart staff training and parent learning programmes, awarded respectively by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) and the Open College Network (OCN) the Foundation has assisted the NO in drawing up a training and accreditation plan for staff and parents of Lifestart projects in the Republic of Ireland and supported an application for funding for a NO training and accreditation officer. As the accreditation centre, the Foundation acts as the internal/external moderator for Lifestart accredited training and in this role will be assisting the NO in setting up internal moderation systems and procedures.

Throughout the year the Foundation and National Office have been implementing a Cross-border Project funded by Interreg IIIA. The Regional Officer employed by the project has been working to ensure that children birth-5 years and the interests of parents are reflected in policy and strategic planning North and South of the border. The Project worker, with support from the Foundation and National Office, has facilitated a series of networking seminars for project co-ordinators, developed a brochure and website for the National Office, contributed to policy development through engagement in key children services networks and organisations and raised the Lifestart profile through other promotional activities.

An application for an extension of funding for the Cross-border Project is currently being made which, if successful, will allow for further strategic work related to promotion, training and future sustainability and growth.

The Foundation with assistance from the National Office has been formulating strategic plans with a view to sustaining efficient and effective development of Lifestart throughout Ireland.

Lifestart Projects

There are currently 19 community-based Lifestart projects in Ireland, each with its own management committee and staff.

There are seven projects in the North employing 34 staff and serving 837 families and 1029 children and twelve projects in the South, employing 79 people and serving 1544 families and 1974 children.

Existing Projects are:

Ballymun Early Years Project Ltd	Lifestart Mid Ards
Carlow Parents' Support	Lifestart Newtowncunningham
Drogheda Lifestart	Lifestart Strabane District
Dunluce Family Centre Ltd. Derry	Mulhuddart Lifestart Dublin
Kilkenny Parents' Support	Offaly/Kildare Lifestart
Leitrim Lifestart	Sligo Family Support Ltd.
Lifestart Cherry Orchard Dublin	Templemore Early Years Centre Ltd. Derry
Lifestart Downpatrick	Tír Boghaine Lifestart Donegal
Lifestart Lifford/Letterkenny	Westville Family Resource Centre Enniskillen
Lifestart Limavady	

Project staffing and contact details are contained in Annex 1.

The Foundation strives to work to promote Lifestart and to expand and extend programme delivery throughout the rest of Ireland, particularly in the East of NI and in the South West of the ROI and to devise further efficient ways of extending parent access to the programme. To this end the Council of the Foundation has been strategically planning to incorporate a regional focus. The Foundation and National Office have been lobbying Government Ministers and Departments for mainstream funding and support.

The Foundation and the National Office are also working at local level to support Projects to deepen their penetration in the communities in which they are set, to work in partnership with each other and with other agencies and bodies and to extend their boundaries to include new communities. In the North six of the seven Northern Ireland Projects are working in partnership with Surestart, the government funded children's services programme implemented through four NI Childcare Partnerships.

The Foundation is represented on two Steering Panels recently established to set up two further Surestart Projects in Belfast and is seeking representation on two Panels to be established for Surestart Projects in the Creggan/Brandywell and Waterside areas of Derry. It is hoped that the extension of Surestart into these and into other areas of Northern Ireland will include the contracting of the Lifestart Programme and services from already existing Projects and the expansion of Lifestart into new areas.

The Foundation has also been supporting the National Office in its efforts to assist ROI projects in their negotiations with the Health Service Executive and other funders for resources to sustain and extend project activities and services.

Another important focus of Foundation support activity with the Lifestart Projects this year has been related to the rationalisation and standardisation of Project organisational policies, processes and systems. Much of the work of the Foundation over many years has concentrated on developing the Lifestart curriculum, programme delivery mechanism and staff training and accreditation. The Foundation Council feels that the time is now right to consolidate the development process through rationalisation and standardisation to ease the expansion of delivery and to assist organisational growth.

Overseas Projects

The Lifestart Programme has been successfully delivered in Macedonia for nine years. The **Macedonian Project** arose as a consequence of a presentation made by the Foundation to 'Focus on Children', an organisation which had been asked by UNICEF to identify childcare programmes which might be transferable to the cultural, political and geographical conditions of Macedonia. A successful application to the Macedonian Minister of Foreign Affairs to establish a Lifestart Project was made by Foundation on July 15, 1997 and an agreement to implement the Project was drawn up between the

Ministry of Education and Physical Culture, UNICEF and the Foundation in September 1997. Fifteen people from Macedonia visited the Foundation for intensive training in 2000. The visiting group included Lifestart Project staff and representatives of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Director of the Institute for Social Activities. Training was focused on Lifestart principles and values, delivering the Lifestart Programme and on training Project co-ordinators, family visitors, administrators, 'Phase 3' workers and other staff. There are now 4 Lifestart co-ordinators and 56 family visitors working in Macedonia.

The Programme is offered through 50 area based centres which also provide pre-school and after-school services and the centres are currently providing the Lifestart programme and other services to 9873 children.

In her annual report to the Foundation Elizabeta Janekiewskia, the Macedonian National Co-ordinator, highlighted the very positive contribution the Lifestart Programme has made to improved educational outcomes among children citing as observed effects - quicker adaptation and more successful socialisation in the transition for home to school, pre-established learning habits, acquired knowledge as a pre-requisite for further learning and better recognition of and orientation to school and group rules – all of which are reflected in improved school performance and results.

Lifestart Zambia is a newly established project in the Mazabucca area of Zambia. The Republic of Zambia is a large country at the heart of sub-equatorial Africa. More than a quarter of its eight or more million people live in two urban areas near the centre: in the capital Lusaka and in the industrial towns of the Copperbelt. The rest of Zambia is very sparsely populated and the majority of people make their living as subsistence farmers.

In development terms Zambia ranks low in the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Index, at 166 out of 177 countries (2005). It is one of the poorest and least developed nations on earth.

Around two-thirds of the population live on less than a dollar a day. Infant mortality rates are amongst the worst in sub Saharan Africa. Zambia also has one of the world's highest incidences of AIDS. It kills around 100,000 people each year.

One in five mothers is HIV positive and 710,000 children are AIDS orphans. 65% of hospital beds in Zambia are occupied by HIV/AIDS patients. Apart from AIDS, the main causes of death are malaria (50,000 each year), tuberculosis, diarrhoea, pneumonia and other preventable or treatable infections. It is in these very difficult circumstances that the Lifestart Project was formally constituted and the contract signed with the Foundation in February 2004.

The Sisters of Mercy are Trustees to the Project and it is managed by a committee of local people. Project staff includes a Manager, a Co-ordinator, eight family visitors and an Administrator. The Lifestart Programme has been translated into, Chi Tonga, the main local language and it is being delivered to 460 children. Two members of the Zambian Project Staff came to the Foundation for training in February 2005 and a group led by the Foundation visited the Project in Zambia in June of this year.

The aim of this latter visit was to assist the Project through the provision of training for the Management Committee and staff and to work with parents. Training sessions included the following topics:

Project Staff

Introducing Zambia to the rest of the world (Visioning exercise)
Lifestart as Curriculum
Principles of Lifestart
Team Building
Confidentiality

Parents

Parenting
Affirmation
Movement and dance
Story making/telling
Art
Communicating with children about death and bereavement

Mary Cudden, the Project's manager recently reported that the Lifestart Project is developing very well and that the training provided for both staff and parents has already had a significant impact.

The Management Committee has now drawn up its Constitution and the Phase 3 element of the training has proved to be a very effective means of engaging and involving parents, who responded exceptionally well to it. Given the very poor housing conditions in the Mazabucca area, Phase 3 activity has come to be an important element of the Zambian Lifestart Project. The Project's future plans include a purpose built children's centre in Mazabucca.

Training and Accreditation

ILM Level 2 Course in Team Leading: On March 20th 2006 the latest run of ILM Level 2 Course in Team Leading for Lifestart family visitors was completed.

The ILM External Verifier assigned to the Lifestart Foundation visited the Foundation Office and carried out the verification procedure on June 6th. All participants in the course passed with ease. Certification was completed in July and Certificates were presented to the participants at a Graduation Ceremony in the Verbal Arts Centre on Monday the 11th of Sept 2006. A new run of the ILM Level 2 Course is now underway and will be completed in March 2007.



Graduation Ceremony September 2006

Work has also been completed on mapping and preparing materials appropriate for the ILM Level 3 Course in First-line Management. This Course is offered to Co-ordinators of Projects as well as to interested outside agencies.

OCN/Lifestart Parenting Programme – Phase 3: A new Unit has been produced for inclusion in the Lifestart Parenting Programme. This Unit, entitled Practical Parenting, along with the other two Units, Creative Parenting and Parental Personal Development has expanded the choice of topics available to parents through the Lifestart Programme. The Lifestart Parenting Programme is accredited by the Open College Network. The Foundation this year acquired funding from the Eastern Health and Social Services Board to fund Phase 3 training programmes in 2 Northern Ireland Projects.

Community Fund Audit: On the 26th September a full external audit of the Cross-Border Training Project - January 2003 to January 2005 - took place. Particular attention was given to the financial and monitoring procedures which were used over the lifetime of the project. All plans and procedures were carried out to the satisfaction of the auditor.

National Office Training Plans: As indicated above planning is in process with the National Office to create a training plan which will enable the projects in the Republic of Ireland to avail of the ILM and OCN courses offered and moderated by the Foundation. This planning is ongoing and its success will depend on the ability of the National Office to access funding so that the agreed plan can be implemented.

Big Lottery Funding: The Lifestart Foundation recognises the importance in terms of high quality service delivery of developing the skills and expertise of staff through the provision of professional training opportunities and the value to parents' confidence and self-esteem and, in many cases, future learning opportunities of access to accredited learning. The Council is very grateful to the Big Lottery for the on-going funding it has supplied which has enabled the Foundation to continue to implement its Training and Accreditation plans.

Policy Input

This is a time of transition throughout Ireland in terms of both policy and practice concerning children. Underlying this transition is the UN Convention of Children's Rights. A new operating context has been created which in itself is a clear indication that children are increasingly recognised within the social agenda and that their needs and rights are being addressed today in ways never seen before. The realisation that children have *rights* as well as *needs* and a growing recognition of the benefits – economic and social – of early years intervention, calls for a radically new approach to planning, service delivery and financial investment in early years intervention and support.

The emergence of such an approach is evidenced in the appointment of Children's Ministers in both parts of Ireland and the increasing adoption in policy development and planning of a 'whole-child' and rights based agenda, as well as the shifting emphasis to preventive and early intervention and to partnership working and the recognition by policy makers and children's services practitioners of the role of parents and communities in ensuring positive child development outcomes.

Policy developments in Northern Ireland over the last year have included: a review of pre-school education; the re-focus of nursery provision; the shift in responsibility for Early Years to the Department of Education (effective from 2007); increased funding for the roll-out of Surestart and for extended schools; a proposed new programme for 2-year-olds and the long awaited launch of the 10 year strategy for Children and Young People NI 2006-2016.

The Ten Year Strategy includes a number of actions related to supporting 'learning and achieving' in early life but no specific mention is made in the Strategy of home-based parent learning support or the need to support parents with children in the first and most developmentally important two years of the child's life, in spite of the increasing volume of empirical evidence which confirms the effectiveness of child-centred parent-directed activities in these crucial early years.

A fact already recognised in the Birth to Three Matters Framework and by the UK government in its recently published Social Exclusion Action Plan which proposes to fund and 'rigorously evaluate' 10 health-led home-based pilot parent support projects in England.

The Foundation has been vigorously lobbying the Minister for Children, the Children's Commissioner, the office of OFM/DFM, senior staff in the DHSSPS and the Department of Education and other key stakeholders. Lifestart has representation on a number of working committees and bodies to promote the inclusion of home-based provision in the Action Plan to be drawn up to implement the Strategy and for the inclusion of home-based providers in proposed new regional services planning and implementation structures, associated with the Review of Public Administration.

In response to a question put to the NI Minister at a recent meeting of the All Party Group on Children and Young People, the Minister indicated a commitment to apply the Birth to Three Matters

Framework to NI and requested further information on Lifestart activities in the light of the home-based pilot projects proposed in the Social Exclusion Action Plan.

The Foundation has also made presentations to: the Family Support Unit of the DHSSPS, which is currently working on a draft Family Support Strategy; to the policy and planning division of the Department of Education; to the Eastern Health & Social Services Board; and to the Western Childcare Partnership and will be presenting to the Northern Childcare Partnership in November 2006.

Similarly in the Republic of Ireland the National Office has been lobbying the Children's Minister, the Health Service Executive and other relevant Government Departments and bodies to ensure awareness of and support for home-based parent learning support.

The NO is represented on the Irish Childcare Policy Network; the Children's Rights Alliance; the National Women's Council of Ireland and the Wheel.

Longitudinal Evaluation

The absence, until recently, of the inclusivity of parents and children in policy frameworks has meant that programmes pertaining to children and parents have not been subject to robust evaluation. The new policy framework however has brought with it a greater emphasis on supporting 'evidence-based practice'.

Hence the Council views the future development of the Lifestart Foundation and its affiliated Projects as closely linked to the conduct, progress and eventual outcomes of the longitudinal evaluation. The Council is also very aware that the field of evaluative research into social and community interventions is itself changing in the direction of a more scientific and positivistic approach to research design. Accordingly the Foundation is endeavouring to ensure that a rigorous experimental evaluation of the Lifestart programme is carried out, the results of which will contribute to (a) the field of Early-Years Intervention and (b) the field of evaluative research methodology related to Early-Years programmes.

Significant progress has now been made in relation to the re-design of the evaluation to incorporate a random controlled trial (RCT) i.e. a methodology based on the random allocation of families to either Lifestart or a non-participating control group which eliminates ambiguities and potential bias associated with a quasi-experimental design. The adoption of a RCT will not only allow for a more scientifically rigorous study but the inclusion of the Lifestart impact evaluation in a broad series of evaluative studies of social interventions currently being funded and conducted by Atlantic Philanthropies using a common evaluative approach and framework.

The design of the random control trail has involved four primary steps:

- Agreement of the logic model i.e. a simplified pictorial model which expresses Lifestart's mission, values, programmes, delivery mechanisms and intended outcomes and impacts
- Manualisation – a description of Lifestart service manuals, their function and relationship the programme and to one another
- Evaluation Strategy – a detailed description of the evaluation strategy and action plan, the cores variables and their causal relationships and how these will be tested and measured
- Research specifications – final detailed research specifications

The Institute of Childcare Research (ICCR), commissioned to carry out the evaluation, has completed a series of focus group sessions with Project co-ordinators, the Lifestart Council and senior Foundation staff and surveyed family visitors and other Lifestart staff members with the aim of informing the design of the study's logic model. A meeting also took place with representatives the Foundation, the Research Team and representatives of the Dartington Social Research Institute (DSRU), the scientific advisors to Atlantic Philanthropies, at which the basic components of the logic model were identified and agreed.

A draft of the logic model has been drawn up by DSRU and the Foundation and the ICCR are currently working on the evaluation strategy and protocol. The final research specifications will be agreed in November and implementation of the new design will begin early in 2007. The valuable work already conducted by the ICCR will form an important part of the Process Evaluation which will continue alongside the Random Control Trail and will remain an important element of the overall study.

The Council would like to take this opportunity to thank the Institute of Child Care Research, the Dartington Social Research Institute, Atlantic Philanthropies and the Lifestart Staff for their work on and commitment to the longitudinal evaluation.

Sustainability/Financing

Financial security and organisational sustainability remain an important issue for the Foundation. Resourcing existing staff and their core activities is central to maintaining the high quality and professional delivery of the Lifestart Programme and to sustaining the organisation through the next seven years of the longitudinal evaluation which, the Council is certain, will generate empirical evidence of the programme's impact not just in terms of more positive social and educational outcomes for children but also in relation of building more resilient families and communities in the societies we serve.

The Foundation is very grateful for the funding it has received to support the activities of the Foundation Office over the last year and, on behalf of all the members of the Lifestart Foundation, the Council gratefully thank the following funders:

- The Big Lottery
- Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (NI)
- Foyle Health and Social Services Trust
- Western Health and Social Services Board
- Sisters of Mercy
- The Atlantic Philanthropies