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| **KEENAGHAN RESEARCH & COMMUNICATIONS Ltd.**  |  |

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**Lifestart At Home in School**

**Programme Review**

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1. **Introduction to Lifestart At Home in School Programme**

# The Lifestart Foundation is a charitable body offering the Growing Child[[1]](#footnote-1) - a parent-directed, child-centred learning programme on child development delivered to parents of children aged from birth to five years old. The Foundation has its Head Office in Derry/L'derry, Northern Ireland; a National Office in the Republic of Ireland (Sligo); a Regional Company in Donegal; three outreach centres in Belfast, Derry and Mid Ards; 12 affiliated service providers in Ireland; a National Office in Macedonia with 50 outreach centres; and a National Office in Zambia, with 13 centres.  These bodies are collectively delivering Lifestart services to the parents of more than 13,000 children.

The Lifestart Programme is a structured month-by-month curriculum of information, knowledge and practical learning activity for parents. The curriculum consists of age-specific information on child development supported by art, story, music and movement resources tailored to suit each individual child and family. It is delivered by trained family visitors in the parents’ own home – the primary environment for early learning and development.

By educating parents on how their children grow and learn, the Lifestart Growing Child programme sets out to help parents to support their child’s physical, intellectual, emotional and social development and to ensure that their children are ‘school ready’ at an appropriate age and are able to take full advantage of preschool and formal learning.

*"The Lifestart mission is to produce better child development outcomes by educating parents on how young children develop and learn in order that they might help their children to reach their full potential" (*[*www.lifestartfoundation.org*](http://www.lifestartfoundation.org)*).*

The Lifestart At Home in School Programme is an additional service that compliments the main Lifestart Programme – the Lifestart Home Visitation service. Through feedback from parents and family visitors, the need for specific support during the transition from primary to secondary school was identified. This need has been further reinforced by policy developments in Ireland and Northern Ireland which highlight the importance of parents and communities in supporting children’s literacy and numeracy development.[[2]](#footnote-2)[[3]](#footnote-3)

The At Home in School Programme was developed by Lifestart in consultation with parents and teachers. It was developed and piloted with two primary schools in the North West of Ireland in 2002, and a revised program has been running in Sligo and Derry since 2010. The primary aim of the programme is to educate and support parents of children who will be starting school in September, so as to enhance the life chances of their children by increasing the child’s potential to succeed within formal education. Karen can you suggest a line here on who is the target group(s) for At Home in School? Have there been specific target groups or is it all children making the transition from primary to secondary?

At Home in School is an innovative approach to ensuring parents and their child have a smooth transition from home/nursery to school. Parents have a key role to play in preparing their child for the world of school. There are lots of simple and practical things parents can do with their child in their own home to give the child the confidence and skills they will need to enjoy learning, to feel comfortable in this new environment and to get on well, and be happy in school. The programme involves parents in early formal education, promotes the home learning environment, and enhances partnership working between parents, schools and children.

The At Home in School programme consists of regular home visits from a trained Lifestart Family visitor who presents the programme information and demonstrates learning activities. Participants also receive information and resources to use with their child in preparing for the home to school transition.

The programme raises awareness and shares learning about topics such as:

* Establishing routine and preparing for school routine
* Positive discipline
* Pre-writing skills, reading and understanding numbers
* Art, colour, basic shapes and which way is up
* Settling in at school
* Independence
* Imaginative play
* Practical partnership
* Self-esteem and confidence
* Communication with the teacher
* The school canteen

Within the school setting the Lifestart Family visitor delivers 6 Play Day interactive parent/child workshops, which provide experiential learning in art, story, music, and messy play and a Parenting programme (accredited by the Open College Network), which is designed to help address the needs of modern day parents through a peer learning and support model. The Parenting programme covers a number of topics including child development, creative parenting, personal development, understanding and managing behaviour.

The At Home in School programme’s key objective *is to help parents actively observe their child* so as to:

* Learn more about their abilities, personalities and insecurities
* Be aware of the importance of, and how to, provide learning experiences for their child
* Practically prepare for and manage the experience of starting school
* Know how to communicate with their child around going to school
* Be aware of how to set up a routine around getting out to school
* Actively promote the child’s emotional development, independence, and build confidence and self esteem
* Be familiar with the types of activities, materials and early learning concepts taught in schools
* Provide similar introductory learning experiences in the home and be aware of how to support the work of the school through art, music, etc.

The programme helps parents to: become familiar with the Key Stage 1 curriculum; promote the development of a good working relationship between home and school; increase parental awareness of behaviours which may occur at this stage and how to provide emotional support for their children through this transition period; improve awareness of the importance of their continuing role in their child’s education into the future, and support their preparation for carry out this role.

At the end of this programme the children will: be more prepared socially and emotionally for the experience of school; have had experience of creative activities (art, music, etc.); have experience of 18 library books; have developed pre-writing skills; be able to recognise the symbols 1 to 5; be able to recognise their own name when written down; be able to recognise 4 basic shapes; and be in a good routine.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**2. Current research into parents’ involvement in preparing children for school**

At Home in School is an evidence-based programme, drawing on current research into parents’ involvement in preparing their children for school. Research shows that parents play a key role in supporting their children’s education from an early age; but parents may be reluctant to help with education activities because they feel they do not have the necessary skills or they are unaware of the positive impact they can have on their child’s education. However, evidence suggests that if parents are supportive of, and have a positive attitude towards, their child’s education then their involvement will help improve the child’s performance regardless of the parents’ own education level. The At Home in School learning activities were developed with reference to research into the parent – child activities that best support children’s education[[5]](#footnote-5).

A recent National Literacy Trust (UK) review[[6]](#footnote-6) of research into the importance of families, and the home environment, in children’s education outlined key findings including:

* Many parents are not aware of the important role they play in children’s education.
* Parents with low literacy are “less likely to help their children with reading and writing”; “feel less confident in doing so” and are “more likely to have children with lower cognitive and language development levels”.
* Parental involvement in a child’s literacy, and support for their learning, has a positive effect on the child’s academic performance.
* The earlier parents become involved in their child’s literacy, the more positive an impact they have on their child’s education.
* Parents can best influence children’s education by supporting learning in their home rather than supporting school activities.
* Parent’s interest in their child’s education is the greatest predictor of achievement at age 16.
* Family involvement in school is most important for children at greatest risk.
* Policies aiming to improve literacy standards should consider parents as “partners in their children’s education from the very beginning of their children’s lives”; raise parental awareness of their role; and provide systems that encourage and support parents as educators in the home.

Research[[7]](#footnote-7) published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2011 highlighted that when parents’ are involved with their child’s reading activities in the first year of primary school, then their child’s reading performance is markedly improved by the age of 15. The child’s improved reading, based on parents reading to children in their early school years, is evident in families of all socio-economic backgrounds.

In summary, the OECD research highlights that:

*“all parents can help their children achieve their full potential by spending some time talking and reading with their children – even, perhaps especially, when their children are very young. Teachers, schools and education systems should explore how they can help busy parents play a more active role in their children’s education, both in and out of school”.*

**3. Findings from At Home in School participants’ perspective**

The following findings are based on the feedback of participants in the pilot phase of the At Home in School programme. A total of 48 parents completed a questionnaire about the At Home in School (AHIS) programme. Focus groups and individual interviews were also conducted with 6 parents and 6 family visitors.

**3.1 Overall impact of At Home in School**

The participants’ feedback indicated high levels of improved confidence, knowledge and abilities in supporting their child’s education. 85% of participants indicated they had more confidence as a parent, with 92% feeling more confident in supporting their child’s education. 98% of participants indicated they had more knowledge of child development, with 87% feeling more able to assess their child’s development. Participants spoke positively about the programme’s impact on their parenting:

*“I am much more confident now doing stuff with (my child). (The family visitor) has really helped me a lot. I think this programme is excellent.”*

*“I didn’t realise how big an effect (my child’s) going to school would have on me as his mother, but the programme helped me feel more involved and supported and helped me adapt.”*

*“I have to say that the Lifestart Service is a fantastic programme which I and the community are very lucky to have and the service of (family visitor) was brilliant.”*

A number of consistent themes emerged from focus group discussions with parents: how to recognise opportunities in everyday activities as opportunities for learning, for child development and for the development of parent-child relationships.

*“It focuses you on what you are doing most of the time anyway, it makes you realise the benefit and learning out of everyday things that you can be doing with your child, like setting the table and their colouring, all those wee things are skills that are helping them when they actually get to school, they know how to do them before they get there”*

*“I thought I was doing well but I think I am a lot better parent than I was before, Definitely, I’m glad I took part in it. It definitely helps them make the transition”*

 *“I thought I was ok (and prepared for my child starting school) until I realised the benefit of it, you think you know, you think you are doing the right thing, but this just helps you so much more, it improves every interaction with your child, you are keeping in the back of your mind how it will help them in the future, so it keeps you focused every time you are talking and working with your child”.*

The Family visitors also spoke positively about the programme. They found the specificity of AHIS objectives maximised the impact of their visit. They found parents were particularly motivated when they had a focus on school and skills for school. Family visitors also noted the increased awareness parents developed for learning and building relationships:

*“It’s so focused, the programme had a real goal, the objectives were very concrete, that we wanted to see the children achieve these certain areas. We had that in our main (Lifestart programme), but this one is more specific about the school goals, it makes it easier to work with, the parents liked that, … the parents really focus on school, school skills, really good positive feedback from the parents”.*

*“The added extra this programme has is that it allows the parents to sit down and do the activities with the children and it creates awareness.”*

*“The added extra was that this programme was hands on and promoted independence and the provision of resources was brilliant.”*

 *“I think what worked best was the parent-child partnership which was allowed to develop.”*

*“It promoted the home learning environment, the parents were glad to learn new activities; they also improved their attitude to their children’s learning and to the child’s school.”*

Family visitors also noted the impact of the program on how parents felt about schools and school work.

79% of participants had more knowledge of their child’s school work, with 60% indicating they were more able to work in partnership with the school:

*“From Nursery to Primary 1 is a big change to any child and the information and materials to help (my child) make that transitions has been fantastic and helped in her progress to Primary 1.”*

*“I was not involved with the school, but the parents seemed more comfortable going into the school and talking to the teachers. Some of the parents would have felt that the teachers were scary like when they were at school, so the parents gained some confidence in dealing with the school and the teachers.”*

*“The children and parents are more comfortable with school and the school work.”*

*“This programme helped to encourage conversation with the school/teachers.”*

Participants and Family visitors made comments on the positive impact of the programme on the children:

*“From the child’s point of view, they are their own person in the classroom, they have to have their own self-esteem and confidence … and I think that is crucial on how they settle, so they are building on all their activities and independence. (The family visitor) said to me if he can cut and do things with scissors then he need not put up his hand and ask for help, and I think that has really helped my son out, he is more confident, he can sit independently and do his work and complete it, they feel part of the group and they feel they are achieving, particularly as well, he was young in his peer group … the teacher to say to me he is on target, he is in the top group in his maths and his reading and I know it’s partly because he is going through this programme, because I have been able to focus on everything every step of the way, it has helped him easily move from nursery to primary school, just settle in completely because we have been working away gradually ”*

*“Independence and their self-esteem is a big rippling effect and their confidence on their learning. It’s as much about them being confident in their new environment, primary school is a step up” Family visitor.*

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| **The Impact of At Home in School** |
|  | **Confidence as a parent** | **Confidence in supporting child's education** | **Knowledge of child development** | **Ability to assess child's development** | **Knowledge of child's school work** | **Ability to work in partnership with the school** | **Your use of story with child** | **Your use of art with child** |
| More | 41/85% | 44/92% | 47/98% | 42/87.5% | 38/79% | 29/60% | 36/75% | 38/79% |
| Same  | 7/15% | 4/8% | 1/2% | 6/12.5% | 10/21% | 19/40% | 12/25% | 9/19% |
| Less | 0/0% | 0/0% | 0/0% | 0/0% | 0/0% | 0/0% | 0/0% | 0/0% |
| **Total****N = 48:** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** | **100%** |

The majority of parents learned to make more use of creative activities such as art, story and music. 74% of participants made more use of story; 79% made more use of art; 63% made more use of music; and 75% made more use of creative movement following their programme participation.

A high number of parents (77%) felt more enjoyment of their time with their child, with 75% more able to talk and listen to their child whilst 79% felt more able to encourage good behaviour:

*“I have learnt a lot with the LifeStart programme and I am very grateful and would like to thank all the team for their help and support over the years.”*

*“Very good, assisted with the interaction between play and learning in line with school activities.”*

85% felt more able to deal with their child ‘playing up’, with 75% more aware of the value of a good routine. 87.5% of participants had improved observation skills:

*“My family visitor has been very good in helping me find other ways at looking and dealing with problems.”*

*“We learnt a lot from (our family visitor) and my child loved to see her coming and was eager to tell her his news ... An excellent service that has been crucial for me and my boys.”*

*“AHIS helped to promote the home learning environment. It helped to improve the parent’s attitude. Parents became more aware of their children’s strong points, how they learn, what they were good at and they enjoyed seeing their child in this way.”*

*“(It made me aware) … not only of his academic needs, but his social needs with his peers and that area.”*

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| **The Impact of At Home In School** |
|  | **Your use of music with child** | **Your use of creative movement with child** | **Enjoyment of time with child** | **Ability to talk/listen to your child** | **Ability to encourage good behaviour** | **Ability to deal with child's behaviour when 'playing up'** | **Awareness of value of good routine** | **Observation Skills** |
| More | 30/63% | 36/75% | 37/77% | 36/75% | 38/79% | 41/85% | 36/75% | 42/87.5% |
| Same  | 17/35% | 12/25% | 11/23% | 11/23% | 9/19% | 6/13% | 12/25% | 6/12.5% |
| Less | 1/2% | 0/0% | 0/0% | 0/0% | 0/0% | 0/0% | 0/0% | 0/0% |
| No Answer | 0/0% | 0/0% | 0/0% | 1/2% | 1/2% | 1/2% | 0/0% | 0/0% |
| **Total:** | **48/100%** | **48/100%** | **48/100%** | **48/100%** | **48/100%** | **48/100%** | **48/100%** | **48/100%** |

*“(My child) was much more confident and he was able to cut and stick and glue, things he would have learned at nursery and things I done at home, but I would never have realised how much a benefit they would be at school, it reinforced everything we got every time.*

Empowerment of parents and of children was a recurring theme in focus groups:

*“I had a good rapport with the school and I would have went to all the meetings like Phonics and about your child…. It was just great having someone come out to your home and showing you all these different things that you are doing with your child and how much independence and knowledge you are giving them by doing these things with them, that you think why would I bother doing them (it puts the value on it)”*

 *“You are not just ticking a box, you know why you are doing it (homework), and how it’s going to help them when you are on that day or week, the counting, then when they go to do their maths it’s not something out of the blue to them, it’s something they have been doing every day, it comes naturally to them, it’s not a big block they have to get across, they are able to understand and just get on with it”..*

 *The games we got, the lotto cards and matching cards with numbers on them, more than less than, so many things and the teacher said he is great at school as well and there is no problem with him and he is well advanced for his age and his confidence had grown as well from doing this course.”*

*“You see a difference in yourself (as a parent) and you are on the right track, , like rolling out clay and asking them which one is the biggest and smallest and you are working on mathematical concepts and you don’t realise you are doing them and it makes you hone in on these skills and it goes into the classroom, because they are doing number work and counting and the teacher is saying they are advanced now and getting it quicker as they have been doing it all along as it is not just overnight, they have been building on this the past year and this is easy to them now, and they are fun things, they are not seen as classwork”*

*“I used to molly coddle my older child, I did more for her, but it was actually hindering her, I’d put her coat on and literally did everything for her and (The family visitor) said let him decide, put two things out and I was guided by (the family visitor) to let him make the choice, he is more decisive now, it was hard at the time to take a step back, but it has paid off he is an independent person, he can do things for himself … he is going to be an adult one day, it’s about giving them all them skills but subtle doing it, knowing that you are doing the right thing helps you along”.*

*“The teacher said it (Lifestart) has definitely paid off with him, I didn’t have any problems with him … but you have the information helping you, … and he is five now and is able to read signs on the street, it has really brought them on, I think it’s great I have been telling my friends and the schools about it, I wish I had had it before [my other child] started school”*

**3.2 Programme content and resources**

As part of the At Home in School programme, parents receive information, ideas and resources which they use with their child to prepare themselves and their child for the home/nursery to school transition. The resources include 18 issues of At Home in School materials, alongside library books, a developmental toy library and art materials.

The overwhelming majority of participants gave positive feedback on the At Home in School programme resources. All the participants found the issues to be attractive, readable, relevant and informative, with 98% of participants noting that the issues were interesting:

*“The programme materials were excellent and always so relevant to the actual age and developmental stage (my child) was at.”*

*“I enjoyed using the resources with (my child) it allowed me to be creative and help him.”*

*“(The resource packs were) very, very good, very useful, informative and creative.”*

*“I found them (the issues) very relevant, well laid out, easy to read.”*

*“Easy to read as not too many pages, but still enough information for busy mums and dads.”*

*“The sheets we got every month, reinstated what you were doing and ways you could get your child prepared for school”.*

Family visitors found the programme content and resources worked very well, particularly as a complement to the Growing Child.

*“In comparison to other programmes the content of this programme draws the parent’s attention to getting the child ready for school, in areas such as getting the child to learn how to put their own shoes and coat on and how to go to the toilet. It complemented the main Lifestart programme as the parent’s enjoyed that it was from birth upwards and I worked with the same parents and children on both programmes.”*

*“In comparison to other programmes having the resources to hand was brilliant. AHIS reinforced the main Lifestart programme, it helped with the children’s reading and it didn’t cost a fortune.”*

The programme resource packs were also considered highly useful and enjoyable. All the participants indicated that the resource packs were fun; practical; interesting; and added more value to the programme.

*“The resources packs were informative and easy to follow.”*

*“Materials were excellent, evident that time was taken to produce them.”*

*“Resources were excellent.”*

*“These (the resource packs) added to the programme greatly.”*

The Family visitors suggested that the resources were the ‘added extra’ that enabled parents and children to engage with the programme:

*“The provision of resources was brilliant as they allowed us to actually demonstrate to the children and the parents what we are teaching and they could use the same resources when we were gone. The resources made the families more interested in the programme.”*

*“My experience was different than the other family visitors. The families I worked with have no access to resources that most families usually have anyway, so these families really appreciated my help and having access to resources and the use of them in their own home in their own time.”*

*“These children who were moving from playschool to primary school appreciated and were delighted at being shown the simple things like cutting pictures out of catalogues and using old paper. The parents were happy to see that some resources do not cost a fortune.”*

*“The packs, the resources, were a great aid to encourage the parents to carry out the activities at home as well, whereas with the ‘Growing Child’ a lot of it was down to them to take the lead, which if you have four or five children it is not that easy but to go and dig out cardboard boxes and make lotto cards, that was great aswell.”*

*“The only thing I found was that a lot of resources were given to the families at the start and there were some months where we did not have many resources to bring with us, which let down the programme that was being delivered that day. The resources should be spread out more evenly so that every month the families are provided with a decent amount of resources.”*

96% of participants made frequent use of the At Home in School Programme resources:

*“The visits were every fortnight, then every month, it was a treat when the family visitor came, it was like Christmas;, chalk, a blackboard, books and jigsaws, loads of things to do and some of the stuff had to go back, books and jigsaws for the other children”.*

* 1. **Programme activities**

The At Home in School Family visitor demonstrates learning activities whilst visiting families in their home. 63% of participants carried out the activities most of the time, whilst 29% always carried out the activities:

*“The resources as well, … the clay and all the materials, … their gross and fine motor skills, during the activity of getting him to hold a pencil, (the family visitor) had always told me to get him to hold the crayons and the chalk properly by himself, I think that really helped (my child) for when he actually started his writing at school.”*

*“To begin with we always carried out the activities, but as I went back to work I found I couldn’t do as much with him as before, plus his homework! But that’s the only reason we done the activities mostly and not always”*

*“The parents got involved in the activities big time especially during the summer months; they would do as much as they can. They knew it was important to get their children ready for school and they had more free time in the summer to take part in these activities.”*

*“Parents found that once the child started school they were too busy to do the AHIS activities as they felt they had to concentrate on the child’s homework and the kids got tired.”*

96% of the participants agreed that the activities were fun, attractive, interesting, practical and valuable.

*“I loved seeing his sense of achievement when he completed activities.”*

*“The activities were like his ‘1st homework’ and very much helped to introduce the idea of homework as more fun learning he could do at home.”*

*“(My child) always loved the activities especially the art based and creative activities. He was learning so much but enjoying doing it.”*

*“The best thing I found was that the half hour work the children done with the AHIS was a big thing, as it got the children into the habit of sitting down and doing some work, which helped them get into the habit and routine of doing homework.”*

*“The resources as well, … the clay and all the materials, … their gross and fine motor skills, during the activity of getting him to hold a pencil, (the family visitor) had always told me to get him to hold the crayons and the chalk properly by himself, I think that really helped (my child) for when he actually started his writing at school.”*

**3.4. Family visitor**

At Home in School provides families with regular home visits from a trained Lifestart Family visitor. These visits consist of 12 home visits for 6 months pre-primary school entry and 6 home visits for 6 months post primary school entry. The Family visitor discusses the child’s progress and supports both parent and child through this critical transition period. He/she bridges the gap between home and school and encourages the establishment of a good working relationship between parent and school staff. The Family visitor also delivers Play Day interactive parent/child workshops in the school.

All participants noted that their Family visitor was friendly, relevant, informative, and worked in partnership with them. There was no negative feedback about the Family visitor.

Participants indicated a range of positive skills and attributes held by their Family visitor including trustworthy (79%); confident (85%) flexible (71%); reliable (85%); and knows their stuff (90%):

 *“(The family visitor) has helped me in so many ways in improving my parenting skills. Showing me how my confidence with (my child) can in turn help his self-esteem.”*

*“(She) is an amazing family visitor. She is so friendly and supportive, always ready to listen and has so much knowledge. (The family visitor) went the extra mile and went out of her way to help.”*

*“She was absolutely brilliant and I, and we as a family could not ask for anymore. She was fantastic at her job and this year I have learnt a lot from her as a person and as a parent.”*

*“(She) is an amazing family visitor/Lady. Will miss my monthly visits, thank you so much for everything.”*

*“My family visitor has been great, she helped with tackling issues with my other child, she listened gratefully and always had the time when needed.”*

*“I feel that the programme would not have been the same if it wasn’t for the support of the family visitor.”*

*“The resource were perfect you get plenty of stuff, the family visitor checks with us regularly to see to we have enough stuff, like glue and we got updated with more stuff too, … the resources were varied as well, matching cards sets and number as well, they are learning vocabulary, motor skills and the numbers sided too … creative in all different areas”*

*“The person delivering the programme has a big part to play, if they are flexible … I felt really comfortable them coming into my home … they have the focus and the commitment to do it too, but it has to be easy too and (the family visitor) made it easy for me too, so it keeps you on the programme rather than giving up all together and saying I can’t do it … the person delivering it needs to be approachable and relaxed so you feel comfortable with them and to fit into your home … they are coming out to help you, not to judge you, they are on a level with you and they may have children themselves too, they can relates to you.”*

*“At first it’s scary, when you are having your first couple of home visits, oh I better clean the house, but then you realise they are not there to inspect you house they are there to give you valuable information about your child, and it goes out the window that kind of fear, is the floor clean, that silly stuff that people have, … its getting them through the door, then after you feel comfortable with them.”*

There was evidence that the presence of the family visitor impacted on the wider family through improving parenting skills and confidence.

“*My other older children loved it when the family visitor came, she would have brought an extra scrapbook for them or extra chalk and they thought this was great,.. they made the signs for the doors as well as my younger child and they got great enjoyment out of it … It catered for all ages … you don’t want them to feel left out”.*

*“I am finished my visits, I have all the sheets and games, I go through them myself, they are all together in a big container that was provided, and the booklet is in a folder and you can go through it when you want, it was just reconfirming what you are doing with your child … I know now to get the children (and my older children) when they come in from school and get them to do their homework when their mind is more active and I made it fun, they all loved it … get them all to do it together”..*

*“One of the parents I visited, it really impacted her whole parenting in general, there was a huge issue of separation anxiety, … and there was an article on that and good tips, she followed the tips and she was more truthful about what was happening and build it up by five or ten minutes and by the end of the programme, the child was able to go to a youth club on his own, P1 was no problem and she had an older daughter she had difficulties with and from chatting and signposting to Parents advice, she had better communication in the house, maybe not always school related but overall parenting”.*

*“I (as the family visitor) signposted some parents to some organisations they could use with their older children also, as the older children have an influence on the younger child, who will copy the older child’s behaviour.” (Family visitor)*

*“I have worked from the beginning on the pilot project with two people and now in 2012, I work with twelve people. I found my overall experience good.” (Family visitor 1).*

*“I visited once a month which I thought was enough as every two weeks would be too hard.” (Family visitor 2).*

*“I had no problem with the length and timing of the programme. I visited the families monthly” (Family visitor 3).*

1. **Conclusions**

**Karen we can discuss these further when you’ve read the report and ammend to meet your requirments for the document.**

**4.1. Programme design**

Participants in the pilot phase of the Lifestart At Home in School programme responded positively when asked about their experience of the programme. Participant feedback indicated that the programme improved parents’ confidence, skills and abilities in supporting their child’s education. Participants were highly satisfied with the various programme components, such as the family visitor, resources and activities.

The programme design achieves the goal of empowering parents to recognise the importance of their role in the home in relation to their children’s learning and furnishes them with the skills and resources to engage fully in that role. It is recommended that the programme proceed using the current design.

**4.2. Programme content and methodology**

The programme content and the role of the family visitor was considered informative, practical, user friendly and relevant for parents. Participants were very satisfied with the programme resources and with the support provided by the family visitor. The availability and flexibility (in arranging visits and offering support) of the family visitor was mentioned as a positive by several participants. The demonstration of learning activities by the family visitors whilst visiting families in their home is a valuable element of the programme.

To ensure that the programme builds on what resources children may have covered in pre-school it may be useful for family visitors to review what resources have been covered and adapt resources accordingly.

Greater integration of the second half of the programme with the school experience both in relation to family visitor’s connection with the school and the link between homework and programme activities.

**3. Funding and Targeting**

Karen these are the key issues to discuss:

* Best way to approach implementation on a wider scale with a built in evaluation of costs.
* Planned targeting of the programme, prioritising according to need…. Some feeling among FVs that it overlaps with what is covered in preschool but these seems to miss the point of the parent child engagement in learning.
* Role of AHIS viz a viz Growing Child.

 *“(The family visitor) and the school said 90% of what the child will do comes from the home, it’s what you do with your child, you think they are doing that book at school so they should know it but if you are going over it and doing the extra bit that where the difference is made and I think if people know that it’s what you do at home, it’s going to have the biggest impact, the schools and teachers know, but not all parents realise that, (the family visitor) said that it’s what you do in the home that will have the biggest impact in years, later teenager it’s the friends that have the impact on them, we know from doing this programme that what we are doing will have the biggest impact, not just at school, sometimes you say go for that book again, it helps them, that extra effort, giving the push too, it makes a lot of difference”.*

1. Authors who have contributed to the *Growing Child* are: Phil Bach, O.D., Ph.D.,  Miriam Bender, Ph.D., Joseph Braga, Ph.D., Laurie Braga, Ph.D., George Early, Ph.D., Carol R. Gestwicki, M.S., Liam Grimley, Ph.D.  Robert Hannemann, M.D., F.A.A.P., Sylvia Kottler, M.S., Bill Peterson, Ph.D. (www.lifestartfoundation.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Department of Education and Science *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Price Cooper Waterhouse 2008 *Literacy and Numeracy of Pupils in Northern Ireland* Department of Education [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This introduction to At Home in School is based on information sourced from:
Lifestart Foundation. *Lifestart’s At Home in School Issue 1*. Lifestart Foundation: Derry.

Lifestart Foundation. (2010). *Lifestart’s At Home in School Programme Outline*. Lifestart Foundation: Derry. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Examples of research into the parent-child activities that best support children’s education include:

-Melhuish, E., Sylva, C., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2001). *Social, behavioural and cognitive development at 3-4 years in relation to background. The effective provision of pre-school education, EPPE project*. DfEE: London: The Institute of Education.

-Gest, S.D., Freeman, N.R., Domitrovich, C.E. & Welsh, J.A. (2004). Shared book reading and children’s language comprehension skills: the moderating role of parental discipline practices. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, **19**, 319-336.
-Weinberger, J. (1996). A longitudinal study of children’s early literacy experiences at home and later literacy development at home and school. *Journal of Research in Reading, 19*(1), 14-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Bonci, A. (2008.) Revised Cole J. (2011.) *A research review: the importance of families and the home environment.* National Literacy Trust [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. OECD. (2011.) “What can parents do to help their children succeed in school?” *Pisa in Focus 2011/2010 (November).* OECD [↑](#footnote-ref-7)