Chairpersons’ Foreword

We trust that the annual report will inform you of our progress during the year and embolden you in our cause.

We are operating within an extremely challenging environment, where those potential franchisees we seek to attain, are beset with service pressures, financial constraints and, in some cases, institutional inertia. The upscaling of service delivery is necessary in the achievement of our mission. The “vehicle” we provide to transport parents and their children to a better place, has passed its worthiness test with flying colours.

We acknowledge the dedication and professionalism of all our staff so ably led by Dr Pauline Mc Clenaghan. We are grateful to our funders and franchisees for their ongoing involvement and commitment to Lifestart.

Finally I pay tribute to the Board Members of the Foundation and our offshoot companies for their sterling service and wise counsel.

Patrick Durkan
Chairperson
Lifestart Foundation
Introduction

The Lifestart Foundation is a long-established all-Ireland charitable body with 30 years’ experience delivering high quality parenting education and family support. Our mission is to improve child development outcomes by making available to parents evidence-based knowledge and information on how young children develop and learn.

Our aims are to:

- reduce the risk to children by supporting parents to provide good nurture and a good home learning environment
- enhance parental competency, agency and efficacy
- support positive parental identities and strengthen parent and child self-concepts and interaction
- train and support parents to use play, scaffolded learning and other techniques to promote child development and learning
- make expert knowledge available and accessible to parents for their own use
- connect parents’ intimate and personal knowledge of their children with the public knowledge of experts
- support parents to respond to and further their children’s rights
- improve parent access to and use of family and children’s support services appropriate to their needs

All the empirical evidence on child development shows that the two most important variables affecting child outcomes are attachment and the home learning environment.
The research shows that compromised parenting is a very serious child development risk factor but that good parenting can act as a protective factor, reducing the impact of other difficult or challenging family or parent/child personal circumstances that have the potential to negatively impact on child outcomes. Good quality one-to-one evidence-based parenting support has been shown to contribute to child protection, child resilience, health and school readiness and good infant and child mental health and wellbeing.

The Lifestart Growing Child programme is a proven, cost-effective, evidence-based intervention delivered through home visits to the parents of children from birth to pre-school or school entry. It is delivered by family visitors employed by service providers licensed through a Social Franchising Agreement with Lifestart Resources Ltd, the social enterprise arm of the Lifestart Foundation charity.

Family Visitors visit parents at least once a month or more often, depending on need and share with them age appropriate evidence-based information on child development and learning. The family visitor demonstrates the use of this information and supporting resources (books, toys etc.) with the parent and the child using a dialogic and scaffolded approach to parent/child learning and a strengths-based approach to family support.

The home visits focus on empowering parents to provide good child nurture, on parent/child attachment and communication and on providing a good home learning environment as the child grows and develops.

The beneficiaries of our work are parents, children and the wider society and the purpose of the charity fulfils the requirements of the Charities Commission.

Company objective 2015-2016

The main objective of the company for the year was to continue to enhance the development and education of children up to the age of five. The strategies used to meet the objective included:

- The completion of the randomised controlled trial of programme impact and the dissemination of research findings
- Continued efforts to build organisational sustainability through the marketing and promotion of the social franchising licensing model
- Strategies to continue to regionalise and up-scale service delivery
The continued integration of our work with children and their families with the child protection, health promotion and family support strategies of statutory bodies

The continuation of our efforts to positively influence public policy in the interests of children and their families.

Achievements and Performance

The Charity has franchise agreements through Lifestart Resources Ltd, with nine service providers located in Ireland in Carlow/Kilkenny, Derry, Donegal, Dublin, Fermanagh, Sligo/Leitrim, Louth, and Tyrone; and a contract with SureStart Ards to offer the Lifestart Growing Child programme and home-visitation service in Mid Ards, County Down. It also has affiliates abroad in Macedonia and in Zambia.

A home visit in Mazabuka Zambia

The highlight of the year was the publication and launch of the results of the randomised controlled trial and process evaluation of Lifestart programme impact conducted by Queens University Belfast. The research findings proved conclusively that the Lifestart Growing Child Programme, delivered through a home visiting service, works as predicted generating positive outcomes for parents and for children. Parents who received the Lifestart programme, in comparison to those in the study control group, were found to be more knowledgeable about child development, had higher levels of parental efficacy, were less

stressed and experienced better parental mood, and had more confidence around child
discipline and boundaries and greater attachment to their children.

Outcomes for children included: better cognitive development, better socio-emotional
development and behaviour and a significant reduction in speech and language referrals.
Our focus since the publication of the study results has been on disseminating and
publicising the study findings through children and family support networks and through
conference presentations and publications.

Launch of Lifestart Study at Queens University May 2015

From left to right: Dr Pauline McClenaghan, Executive Director Lifestart Foundation,
Dr Laura Dunne and Dr Sarah Miller, Principal Investigators Lifestart Randomised Controlled
Trial Evaluation and Professor Paul Connolly

The Charity has continued to advance the integration of its work with that of statutory
colleagues, by implementing the three year pilot project with the North Western Health and
Social Care Trust that makes the Lifestart Programme, delivered by statutory employees,
available to referred families throughout the Western Trust Area. The pilot project is based
on a very successful model of service delivery initially developed by the Foundation and
implemented by Lifestart Services Ltd as a region-wide referred service in County Donegal
and now also being operated by the Sligo Family Centre in Counties Sligo, Leitrim and West
Cavan.

The Foundation has trained 26 WHSCT staff to deliver the Lifestart programme and currently
just under half this number are delivering to referred families; including one Trust employee
who is working full-time on the Lifestart/WHSCT pilot project and a full-time Lifestart family
visitor. The pilot project is the subject of an independent external evaluation being conducted
by Dr Helga Sneddon, Outcomes Imp Ltd who has undertaken a process and outcomes evaluation using measuring instruments derived from those used in the RCT evaluation.

We have continued to work with our franchisees and other partners to promote closer working relationships with statutory bodies and to upscale nationally the Lifestart service and we continue to actively promote the Lifestart franchise in Ireland and elsewhere.

Working in partnership with Tiny Life we are implementing a joint project funded by the Big Lottery that is making the Lifestart programme available to pre-term children throughout NI and we are currently exploring with Tiny Life other possible partnership projects.

Lifestart staff members continue to be actively involved in strategic networks and systems at a Local, Regional, National and European levels, and participate in and present at national and international conferences on parenting and family support. This year the focus of Lifestart conference contributions has been on the positive findings of the evaluative study presented at international conferences in Dublin, Galway and London.

The Foundation’s Executive Director also presented on the Lifestart programme and service at an international seminar in Marrakech, Morocco in April 2015 which was hosted on behalf of the Community of Practice and Knowledge, formed the year before at an international workshop on parenting support, hosted by Apprentis D’Auteuil, a Paris based charity that has been providing services for children and their families for 150 years.

Dr Pauline McClenaghan and other seminar participants Marrakech 2015
As a result of Lifestart’s participation in these two events we have been invited to host the 2016 meeting of the Practice Community in Northern Ireland. The theme of this international seminar will be ‘Empowering Parents and Children’s Rights’ and it will include delegates from organisations from France, Belgium, the Congo, Germany, Italy, Greece, the Philippines, the Lebanon, Morocco, Canada, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Visiting practitioners will hear from children’s rights advocates, policy makers and statutory representatives and the event will allow the Lifestart Foundation to showcase its work in Ireland. Delegates will have an opportunity to visit Lifestart service providers in Derry City and in County Donegal and to learn more about our shared historical and cultural heritage and our common efforts to guarantee children’s rights and to improve child outcomes by supporting parenting.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE
Our plans for the immediate future are to continue to work to secure the sustainability of the charity, and the vital work the charity undertakes to promote and support the delivery of the evidence-based and now proven Lifestart Growing Child programme. Armed with the evidence from the Lifestart Study we aim to secure franchise agreements throughout Ireland and elsewhere sufficient to sustain the charity’s operations and to upscale service delivery. We are currently focused on redesigning and updating our website www.lifestartfoundation.org which will be an important tool in our current and future promotional efforts.

Thanks
The Lifestart Council thank all parents (and children) who throughout 2015-2016 received the Growing Child Programme through home visits and who participated in other Lifestart programmes. We also thank all those who contributed to the Lifestart Mission - staff, volunteer management committees and our funders, without whom the programme and service would not be available: - The Atlantic Philanthropies; the Western Health and Social Care Trust; SureStart Ards; the Child and Family Agency; and the Katherine Howard Foundation, as well as the many other funders who support the work of Lifestart Franchisees. We also thank the professional colleagues with whom we work every day to improve outcomes for children.
Appendix 1
Lifestart Council Members
P. Durkan  Chairperson
U. Birthistle  Vice-chair
M. Wrynn
M. McGowan
M. McReynolds

Non-voting Members
S. O’Callaghan  Company Secretary

Lifestart Foundation Staff
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L. Douglas  Operations Manager
E. Doherty  Administrator
S. O’Callaghan  Finance Manager
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P. Buchanan  Family Visitor
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M. Lee  Treasurer
P. Durkan
H. Harding
R. McGlone
M. Wrynn

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