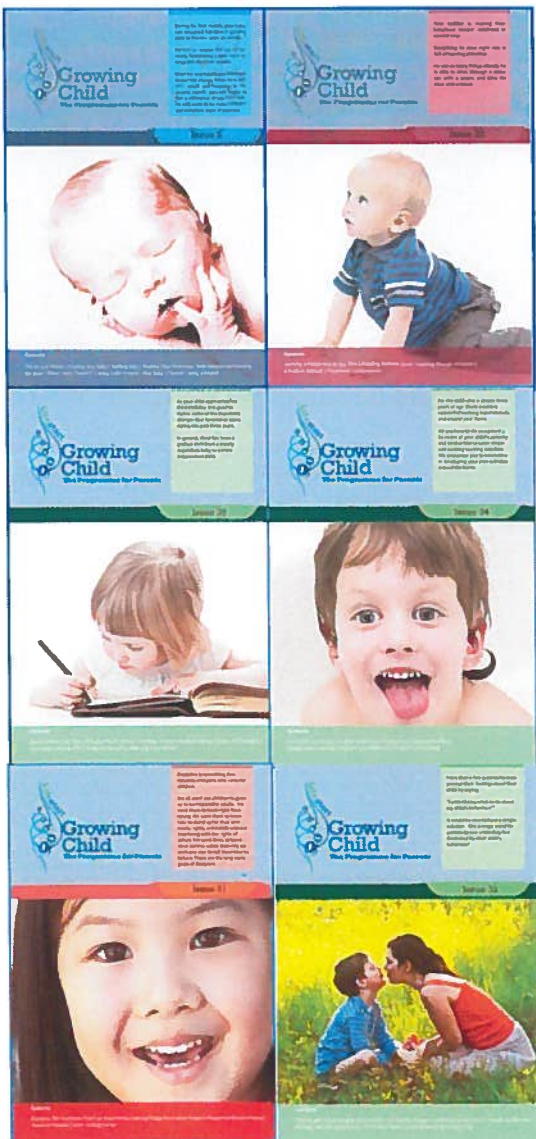


# Lifestart Foundation Annual Report 2014-2015



**Growing Child**  
The Programme for Parents



**Lifestart Foundation**  
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## **Chairperson's Foreword**

On behalf of the Lifestart Foundation we invite you to read our Annual Report and get an update on our activities, achievements and aspirations.

The major outcome for Lifestart in the past year has been the completion of the evaluation by Queens University. Their research has provided clear and substantial evidence on the efficacy of the Lifestart Programme. This was our expectation. Such validation should serve the requirement of those who commission early years and family support services, to use the Lifestart model to fulfil their statutory/community objectives.

We acknowledge the dedicated efforts and input of all our staff during the past year. Dr Pauline McClenaghan, our Executive Director has been a lynchpin in coordinating and managing our activities.

The Lifestart Foundation has had immense financial and strategic support from Atlantic Philanthropies over many years and our progress is largely attributable to that support.

Our challenge now is to champion the adoption of the Lifestart Programme through integration with commissioners of services and franchising the Lifestart Model. Lifestart, in early year's provision represents value for money and produces quality outcomes for service providers and for service users.

We hope you find our report interesting and that it emboldens you to be a Proclaimer for Lifestart.

Patrick Durkan  
Chair  
Lifestart Foundation

## Introduction

The Lifestart Foundation has 29 years' experience in the delivery of high quality parenting education and family support. Supporting parents and in particular those parents whose children are deemed vulnerable, is now understood as key to interventions aimed at: improving child protection; promoting good infant and child mental health; enhancing child resilience, health and school readiness; improving educational outcomes and reducing the incidence of youth delinquency and violence.

International research has for decades demonstrated that the foundations for development and learning are constructed in the earliest months and years of life and that it is in early life when children acquire the competence and coping skills that shape their life trajectories<sup>1</sup>.

The evidence confirms that early childhood experiences and, in particular, a child's relationship with his/her parents/primary caregiver provides either a sturdy or fragile base for all that follows and has important consequences for the child's future physical, intellectual, psychological, economic and social wellbeing .

Appropriate care in early life crucially includes (1) *a stimulating and responsive interactive relationship with and attachment to a caring adult* and (2) *a good home-learning environment*. The scale of the impact of these two variables is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups<sup>2</sup>.

Developing the optimal conditions for early childhood development, therefore, involves supporting good at-home parenting and enhancing the pedagogical role of parents. This is the focus of the Lifestart programme and service.

Our mission is to produce better child development outcomes by making available to parents evidence-based knowledge and information on how young children develop and learn.

We implement our mission by promoting and supporting the delivery of the Lifestart *Growing Child* Programme - a systematic evidence-based child development programme delivered through home-visitation to parents of children from birth up to pre-school or school entry.

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<sup>1</sup> McClenaghan, P (2012) Educating Parents Developing Children *Irish Review of CED Law & Politics* Vol. 1 92)

<sup>2</sup> Desforges, C with Abouchaar, A (2003) *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review*. Department of Education and Skills, Research Report RR433, Queen's Printer

The *Growing Child* is outcomes focused and is based on sound empirical research on child development and parenting. It was designed and is reviewed by experts and it has been empirically tested on the island of Ireland through a fully scientific Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT), based on a rigorous experimental design, which proved that the programme works as expected for both for parents and children<sup>3</sup>.

The completion of the Lifestart Longitudinal Evaluative Study is one of five key priorities on which our work has focused over the last year. The other priorities are:

1. Regionalisation and upscaling of Lifestart service delivery
2. The closer integration of our work with the child protection, health promotion and family support strategies of statutory bodies
3. The development of a Social Franchising Licensing Model
4. The continuation of our efforts to positively influence public policy in the interests of children and their families

## Lifestart Evaluative Study



The Lifestart Study based on a six year Randomised Control Trial (RCT) of Lifestart programme impact, supported by a process evaluation, has finally been completed. The results of the study were formally launched in the Great Hall at Queens University Belfast on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2015. Study findings show that the Lifestart programme has statistically significant and consistent positive effects across a range of domains including: parenting related stress, parental knowledge of child development, parental efficacy, parent-child attachment, discipline and boundaries and parental mood with effect sizes ranging from 0.21 to 0.27 based on the Hedges g effect size measure (a rigorous and stringent measure of causal relationships between variables). The results are highly consistent with the hypothesised pathway of change depicted in the Lifestart logic model<sup>4</sup> and Hedges g effect sizes of over 0.25 are recognized internationally as being exceptional for social science programmes such as family support or education.

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<sup>3</sup> Miller, S, Dunne, L and McClenaghan, P (2015) *Briefing Paper, Supporting parents: findings from the Lifestart Parenting Programme Evaluation*, School of Education, Queens University Belfast

<sup>4</sup> Miller, S & Dunne, L (2015) *A Randomised Controlled Trial Evaluation of the Lifestart Parenting Programme*, School of Education, Queens University Belfast

The study also found smaller but positive effects in child development outcomes, in cognitive development and socio-emotional development and a reduction in speech and language referrals among the intervention group. Child outcomes suggest that Lifestart is working as predicted in that the programme generates positive changes in parents, which in turn bring about positive changes for children. The research team hope to follow the future development of children in the RCT in order to test for further benefits downstream.

Quantitative results were reinforced by qualitative data collected as part of the process element of the study which showed that parents in the intervention group were re-assured in their parenting role and were more knowledgeable about their child's development.

## **What parents said about the Lifestart Growing Child Programme**

### **On the information provided:**

*"I actually feel that Lifestart, the programme that they came and delivered monthly, was invaluable to me learning to be a parent, and it helped me understand my children so much more than other new parents...sometimes you don't understand why a child might be acting that way, but Lifestart gives you a bit more insight into a child's mind-set and the stages they go through"*

### **On having a family visitor:**

*"Having someone independent/ impartial who can be asked for advice and worries - got reassurance, ideas from my visitor, someone who could problem solve with me"*

### **On the relationship with their child:**

*"I think it's probably more enhanced than it might have been, cos I look to engage with them in a slightly different way than some of my peers do with their own children"*

### **On benefits for their child:**

*"You can just see the difference in her compared to some of her friends you wouldn't get the same amount of, I suppose stimulating conversation...or spent the same time with them, it has benefitted her greatly, so definitely socially, emotionally, confidence wise, she's just up there, she's definitely happy"*

*"When the same age children were doing the same things, she was always that bit ahead of them and I think that definitely helped when we moved because the academic cut-off date's different here, so she's actually in the year above..."*

### **On the benefits for mum/dad:**

*"More so the parent, it's great for the parent, I would definitely recommend every parent to do it..."*

*"Yes, definitely, it increased my patience"  
"I think it helped me in my confidence as a parent and how I manage as a young mum as well."*

### **On the overall programme:**

*"The best bit actually probably was the home visits and the delivery from the visitor, because that kept the whole thing real and motivated.."*

### **And finally, on who should receive the Programme:**

*"I don't think there's a certain kind of parent because I believe that stigmatises people and makes people become fearful, I think every parent, because you're not given a book, that every parent needs the support at the start of the child's life".*

### At the launch of the Evaluation Reports



From left to right: Dr Sarah Miller, Principal Investigator Lifestart Study, Dr Pauline McClenaghan, Executive Director of Lifestart and Dr Laura Dunne, Principal Investigator Lifestart Study.



From left to right: Dolores McGuinness Founder Member of Lifestart, Nancy and Dennis Dunne Growing Child Inc. Dr Pauline McClenaghan, Executive Director of Lifestart, Ursula Birthistle, Director, Roisin McGlone, Director, Máiríe McReynolds, Director and Patrick Durkan, Chair of the Lifestart Foundation

The Lifestart programme was perceived by parents on the study to be a non-judgemental source of advice, information and support. The relationship with the Lifestart Family Visitor was found to be a key factor in the successful long-term acceptability and enjoyment of the programme, constituting an important component in the generation of positive outcomes.

The evaluative study provides conclusive proof that the Lifestart programme delivered through home-visitation generates the outcomes it claims to generate and the dissemination of study findings will be central to Lifestart promotional strategies in the immediate and in the long-term future.

## **Regionalisatation and Service Provision**

We have continued this year to work with our current and with new affiliates to upscale and extend service provision through social franchising and the regionalisation of service delivery. The *Growing Child* Programme and home-visitation service is currently being delivered to more than 2500 families in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, to 500 families in Mazabuka, Zambia and to families in Macedonia through an affilitate funded by UNICEF.

In Ireland the Foundation this year replaced its traditional Affiliation Agreements with service providers with new Franchise Agreements, offered through Lifestart Resources Ltd, that license existing Lifestart service providers, to deliver the *Growing Child* programme, on terms which take into account their long association with the Lifestart service. Together with new franchisees there are currently nine service providers located in Ireland in Carlow/Kilkenny, Derry, Donegal, Dublin, Fermanagh, Leitrim, Louth, Sligo, West Cavan and Tyrone. Regionalisation was this year completed in the Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan area where the Lifestart service is now being delivered regionally by one organisation holding a Lifestart Franchise – the Sligo Family Centre - which has a delivery target of 500 families.

The Foundation successfully negotiated the continuation of a service level agreement with the South Eastern Health Trust NI, through SureStart Newtownards, which enables the Foundation to offer the Lifestart *Growing Child* programme and home-visitation service to 28 families in the Mid Ards district. In the course of the year we established a partnership project 'TinyStart' with another charity, Tiny Life, to make the programme available to the parents of pre-term children. The TinyStart project is funded by the Big Lottery under its 'Supporting Families Programme' and two part-time family visitors have been appointed to

work on the project and will soon be delivering the *Growing Child* programme, to 40 parents of pre-term babies in the region.

The Foundation is also working on a partnership proposal with Derry Well Women that will involve the appointment of two Lifestart family visitors in DWW who will deliver the *Growing Child* programme to targeted families in the Derry, Limavady and Strabane districts.

In 2014 we acquired funding from Atlantic Philanthropies to develop and implement a three year pilot project with the Western Health and Social Care Trust which will support the delivery of the *Growing Child* programme to a further 320 parents of children referred to the service by Trust social work teams.

### **Integrated Practice**

As a means to upscaling service delivery the Foundation has since 2011 been focused on more effectively addressing the needs of statutory services systems and service commissioners and purchasers by developing shared protocols, mechanisms and procedures that give best effect to the expression of those needs in the implementation of the *Growing Child* programme and service. We have in particular been working in close collaboration with the Health Service Executive and the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) in Counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan and with the Western Health and Social Care Trust in Derry, Tyrone and Fermanagh to integrate Lifestart objectives of improving outcomes for children with the child protection, health promotion and family support objectives of our statutory partners.

In County Donegal we successfully developed and implemented over the last four years an integrated model of family support that incorporates a highly effective, targeted needs-based intervention service, supported by preventive intervention in which the Lifestart programme is available to vulnerable families with high support needs (referred by social work teams and other health and social care professionals) and to all first-time parents (referred by Public Health Nurses).

The model, rolled out in Donegal by Lifestart Services Ltd, which is currently delivering the *Growing Child* programme to 1156 families, is now also being implemented in the Sligo/Leitrim/West Cavan region by the Sligo Family Centre and an adaption of the model is about to be implemented in the Western Health and Social Trust region of NI.



What differentiates the WHSCT/Lifestart partnership model of practice from that developed in the Republic of Ireland is that in this case the fully referred service will be targeted at families known to social services, with the aim of breaking the cycle of disadvantage underlying the inter-generational referral of children into the care system. The programme and service will also be delivered mainly by Family Support workers, employed by our statutory partner, who have been trained and who will be supervised and quality assured by Foundation staff. A highly qualified and experienced researcher, Dr Helga Sneddon Outcomes Imp, has been commissioned to undertake an external evaluation of the pilot project. 14 Trust employees have already been trained in the delivery of the Lifestart programme and an Advisory Committee to the project and an Expert Advisory Committee to the evaluation have been established. Referral criteria and pathways and delivery protocols have been agreed and the Foundation will begin receiving referrals to the service, through the pilot project, on the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015. This is an important initiative which with the evidence emerging from our work in Donegal will further demonstrate the contribution that Lifestart can make at all levels of family support need.

### **What are professional partners said about the Lifestart Programme**

**Area Manager Children's Services** – *“the collaborative model is just what we needed. Lifestart has been able to integrate its service with our child protection and family support objectives and at the same time to offer a preventive service aimed at first time families which is able to identify children who might be at risk”.*

**Public Health Nurse** – *“having Lifestart working so closely with us has been a great asset, our visits to families are months apart but now the Lifestart Family Visitor is in the home on a monthly basis and reports back to us immediately any concerns they have relating to the family, they are our eyes and ears in the home”*

**Social Worker** – *“the Lifestart Family Visitor is the first service provider that has been able to work with this family, we are seeing a huge improvement and in fact social work will now be able to close this case”.*

**Senior Manager Health Service Executive** – *“Lifestart is able to reach and retain high risk families, because there is no stigma attached to it, because it's also offered to all first-time parents”.*

**Social Work Manager** - *“We are extremely happy with the progress made by the family and have noted significant improvements to routine, attitude and parenting by both parents. All in all it appears to be a less stressful environment for all compared to what we were faced with.”*

**Psychologist working for the Health Service Executive** - *“the information Lifestart is collating on parents and children is invaluable to parents and also to services like ours. If a child presents with issues in two or three years time then the reports and observation checklists from their involvement in the Lifestart Growing Child Programme will make our job far easier”.*

**Hospital Doctor** - *“Just to let you know and say thanks for a little girl I had been seeing at my clinic. The tasks and skills that the Lifestart workers instructed mum with has helped greatly and she has improved a lot as the result of the suggestions re behaviour management put in place by the Lifestart worker.”*

We have this year completed the work on the Franchise Model which will be launched alongside the launch of the Technical, Briefing and Summary Reports of the Lifestart RCT findings at Queens University on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2014. The work on the Franchise Model was extensive and involved the preparation of the Franchise Operations Manuals, Practitioner Manuals and a Trainer's Manual, as well as the Franchise Prospectus and Pack.

<b>Training</b>		
Barnardo's Franchise	Strabane	Oct/Nov 2014
WH SCT Cohort 1	Strabane	March 2015
Sessional Trainers	Dublin	April 2015
WH SCT Cohort 2	Strabane	May 2015
TinyStart Family Visitors	Derry	June 2015

As well as training new franchisee staff, WH SCT delivery staff and TinyStart staff, we have also recruited, trained and qualified a number of sessional trainers, who will in the future assist Foundation staff in the delivery of training to franchisee employees.

<b>Recruitment</b>		
Sessional Trainers	Nationally	Oct 2014
Family Visitors (TinyStart)	Belfast & Derry	April 2014

We are continuing to work to upgrade our website in order to better promote the franchise model.

Our plans for the immediate future are to secure the sustainability of the Foundation and the important training, quality assurance and service support work the charity undertakes. The results of the evaluative study has confirmed the Lifestart *Growing Child* programme delivered through home-visitation as an evidenced-based and effective programme that generates good outcomes for parents and children at relatively low cost. Using this evidence we aim to secure Franchise Agreements throughout Ireland and elsewhere sufficient to sustain the charity's operations and to more effectively upscale service delivery.

## **Policy and Advocacy**

Lifestart personnel continue to be actively involved in strategic networks and systems at a Local, Regional, National and European levels, and staff members are regularly requested to present at national and international conferences on parenting and family support. Among the many events at which Lifestart was this year represented were: the OMEP (World Organisation for Early Education) Annual Conference in Cork in July 2014 where Mary Walker Callaghan, Regional Manager of Lifestart Services Ltd and Patricia McLaughlin, Manager of the Sligo Family Centre, presented on the contribution of the Lifestart programme and service to child school-readiness; the International Society for Cultural Activity Research Conference in Sydney Australia, in October 2014, where the Foundation's Executive Director Dr Pauline McClenaghan presented on the work of Lifestart and on that of Derry Well Woman; the Eurochild Annual Conference in Bucharest in November 2014 where Michelle McCabe, the Foundation's Communications Manager presented on Lifestart; the Children's Research Network Ireland and NI Conference, the Early Intervention Foundation's 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference in London, and the Social Enterprise NI showcase event in Stormont where Michelle gave poster presentations and information stands on our work; the Parenting Special Interest Group Parenting Conference in February 2015 where the Queens Research Team presented on the preliminary findings of the RCT; the Apprentis D'Auteuil International Workshop in Marrakesh in April 2015 where Pauline presented on the Lifestart Programme and Service and on how the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is reflected in our work and the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre 7<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Conference in Galway in June 2015 where Pauline and Mary presented on the Lifestart Family Support Model and on the RCT evaluation results and where Orla Tuohy the Foundation's National Lead Training and Parenting Support presented, on behalf of Tusla, on Parental Participation: Barriers and Enablers.

Orla also authored an article 'Lifestart Family Support Project' which was included as the Ireland case study in the EU Alliance publication 'Investing in Children Implementation Handbook 2015'.

Other Lifestart Service Providers were also represented at and made contributions to conferences, seminars and other events at which they promoted their work and the Lifestart *Growing Child* Programme and service.

<b>Conferences/Seminars</b>			
OMEP International Conference	Cork	July 2014	Presented
CRNINI PHD Symposium	Dublin	August 2014	Attended
ISCAR International Conference	Sydney	October 2014	Presented
George Hosking (Infant Mental Health Seminar)	WHSCT Derry	November 2014	Attended
Eurochild Annual Conference	Bucharest Romania	November 2014	Presented
CRNINI Conference	Dublin	December 2014	Attended
Early Intervention Foundation Annual Conference	London	February 2015	Presentation stand
Parenting Special Interest Group Conference	Dublin	February 2015	QUB presented on Lifestart Evaluation
Barnardo's Conference	London	Feb 2015	Attended
Eurochild General Assembly and Co-ordinators meeting	Brussels	April 2015	Chair of FPS working group
Apprentis D'Auteuil International Workshop	Marrakesh	April 2015	Presented
Social Enterprise NI	Stormont, Belfast	June 2015	Showcase & presentation stand
UNESCO/Child & Family Research Centre International Conference	Galway	June 2015	Presented

In the course of the year the Foundation and Lifestart providers offered feedback on policy issues affecting children and families and staff within the Lifestart family continue to be active members of key advocacy groups working to promote the rights of children and the provision of quality children and family services including:

- o Eurochild – Co-chair of the Parenting and Family Support Thematic Working Group
- o Start Strong – Board of Directors
- o Association of Infant Mental Health UK – NI Board Member
- o Border Counties Childhood Network – Board of Directors & Chair
- o Western Area Outcomes Group
- o PEIN (Prevention and Early Intervention Network)
- o Implementation Network
- o Early Intervention Foundation – Evidence Forum
- o Infant Mental Health Reference Group NI
- o CRNINI (Children’s Research Network Ireland Northern Ireland) (Executive Committee)
- o Implementation Learning Community
- o The Donegal Children’s Services Committee – Vice Chair
- o Children and Young People Services Committee – Education and learning Sub Group/Health and Wellbeing Sub Group
- o The Parenting Hub Donegal
- o Derry Well women – Board of Directors
- o Children’s Rights Alliance
- o Teen Parent Support Programme Advisory Group
- o European Anti-poverty Network Ireland
- o European Alliance for Families (European Platform for Investing in Children – EPIC)
- o National Children’s Bureau NI
- o National Children’s Resource Centre
- o OMEP (World Organisation for Early Years Education)
- o Early Years Strategic Alliance
- o Child Poverty Alliance
- o Child Poverty Forum - Derry
- o National Women’s Council of Ireland
- o Parenting UK
- o NI Parenting Forum
- o The Wheel
- o Chartered Institute of Personnel Development
- o NICVA
- o Inishowen Family Action Network Advisory Group
- o Donegal County Childcare Committee – Vice Chairperson and Company Secretary
- o MEET Project – Motivate, Educate and Exercise Together Programme dealing with obesity for young people and their families with both preventative and maintenance dimensions
- o Springboard Family Support Programme
- o Lagan Primary Care Community Forum
- o Primary Care County Community Forum
- o Sole Purpose Productions
- o Creggan Enterprises – Board of Directors
- o Katharine Howard Foundation/Community Foundation of Ireland Parenting Support Initiative Advisory Group

Orla Tuohy's contract with Tusla has been renewed for a further two and a half years and this will allow her to continue to work with Lifestart to promote and support Lifestart in Ireland and with Dr Aisling Gillen, National Specialist Family Support on the development and roll-out of the Child and Family Agency's Parenting Support Strategy.

Lifestart Services Ltd which is an active member of all key family support bodies in County Donegal acquired further funding this year from the Katherine Howard Foundation to continue to train members of partner organisations throughout County Donegal in child development and family support. Mary Walker Callaghan and a team of LSL family visitors and Patricia McLaughlin of the Sligo Family Centre are working, on behalf of the Foundation, on the development of a Sessional Interventions Manual which will support Lifestart family visitors delivering on specific parenting issues reflecting parent support needs. The information contained in the Sessional Interventions Manual is derived from the evidence-based *Growing Child* programme.

## **Thanks**

The Lifestart Council thank all parents (and children) who throughout 2014-2015 participated in the *Growing Child* Programme and home visitation service and 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 Child and Family Agency; the Western Health and Social Care Trust; SureStart Ards; Lloyds TSB Foundation; and the Katharine Howard Foundation. We also thank the professional colleagues with whom we work every day to improve outcomes for children.

## **Conclusion**

The Lifestart Foundation is at an important juncture in terms of the future of the Lifestart Programme and Service and of organisational sustainability. In the past the Foundation was able to fund its programme development, support, training and quality assurance functions through external grant aid. In a changing economic and funding climate this is no longer the case. The policy and children and family services framework has now shifted to a greater emphasis on service commissioning through public procurement and tendering, a greater emphasis on targeting social need and on referred services and on working with bodies and

organisations that are able to independently sustain the kinds of functions performed by the Foundation.

In response to these changing conditions the Foundation has focused on regionalising service delivery, on supporting the delivery of Lifestart as a targeted service in partnership with statutory bodies and on the development of the Social Franchising model of service licensing as an avenue to long term sustainability and to the upscaling of service delivery - the ultimate aim of the Foundation. The completion of the Randomised Controlled Trial and the publication of study results should aid us in achieving these objectives, as the positive results come to be more widely known and their implications for children and family support services more widely appreciated.

## **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**

Dr P. McClenaghan    Executive Director  
L. Douglas              Operations Manager  
E. Doherty              Administrator  
S. O'Callaghan  
Finance Manager

M. McCabe              Communication &  
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P. Buchanan            Family Visitor  
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M. O'Neill               Family Visitor  
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M. Lee            Treasurer  
P. Durkan  
H. Harding  
R. McGlone  
M. Wrynn

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