

**South Belfast Sure Start**

**Report of the Trustees**  
**for the Year Ended 31 March 2023**

The trustees who are also directors of the charity for the purposes of the Companies Act 2006, present their report with the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2023. The trustees have adopted the provisions of Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2019).

## **South Belfast Sure Start**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2023**

#### **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

##### **Principle activities**

The principle activities of the company are the provision of activities for the benefit of children aged 0-3 years and their families living in the South Belfast catchment area.

##### **Services and programmes across the year**

As 2022-2023 progressed core services and programmes largely returned to pre Covid 'normal' with a few exceptions. However, it was an extremely challenging year for SBSS in that we lost over 20% of our staff team to other (mostly better paying) posts, forced retirements through illness and other family circumstances. Some of these posts were held by very experienced and skilled people. Recruitment was ongoing throughout the year with challenges, particularly in Early Years, in finding suitable new recruits. The last posts to be filled in these cycles were Early Years Assistants for which we received no applications whatsoever. Fortunately, we had 5 x student placements who were just completing their QCF Level 2 who we were able to employ on temporary contracts with the condition that they started Level 3 training in September 2022. Training up and mentoring new staff (including mandatory training), so we can get back to previous levels of expertise will take several years. In addition, to gaps in staffing arising from recruitment, we also had an unusually high level of staff sickness over the year. There were unavoidable disruptions to services or on occasions reduction in the number of children/sessions per week so that we could remain in ratio. The remaining staff have been outstanding in their willingness to cover gaps and absences, moving to other programmes/communities often at short notice, increasing their hours for temporary periods etc. Without their goodwill and flexibility whole services and programmes would have ground to a halt. SBSS added all of the 2% uplift it received in Autumn 2022 to the wages, but the reality is their reward has been a pay cut in real terms.

Aside from staffing there were still some issues arising from coming out of a global pandemic on services and programmes. Some families remained reluctant to have visitors in their home which contributed to an increase in substantive telephone support or increased numbers attending groups. Weekly Parent & Toddler groups and Baby Café drop-in groups became, in the main, well attended again, and where numbers were deemed to be too high to allow for a productive experience for all, they were divided into two smaller sessions. A few targets, such as Library visits or Antenatal Aqua Yoga and Baby Swim had to be abandoned or reduced as either a venue or service was not available 'post-Covid'. However, having control of a number of premises in different communities enabled us to get face to face services up and running promptly. The Board of Directors decided to continue with our Early Years staffing capacity mainly being focussed on the 2-3-year age group. We were therefore in the position to offer almost all families who requested it, a place in either a Developmental Programme for 2-3 Year Old's or a Child Development Programme in September 2022. By the Autumn we had over 150 children aged 2-3 years in these programmes along with a further 10 placed in a special needs programme in Sólás and a further 24 in one of our 3 'Loving Learning' programmes (funded through the STEP programme). We continued to set targets for all these programmes which reflect best practice such as home and Centre based 1:1 review visits, Wellcomm/bi-lingual screening, monthly 'Stay to Play' or 'Come and Play' sessions, the introductory 'Ready to Play' workshops for parents whose child is entering a programme and transition forms and related activities for children who are leaving a programme.

Because of the move to focusing on 2-3 year olds within the developmental programmes, we realised that a gap in services for children in the 1-2 year old age range was emerging and the numbers in that age group participating in services had fallen. As we moved into 2023 new programmes were developed such as a 4 week 'Sensory Programme' to target this age range and enable children and families to build relationships before entry to developmental programmes.

## **South Belfast Sure Start**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2023**

What became clear as services started to return to more normality was the increasing number of children about whom there are developmental concerns such as speech and language, sensory processing, ASD and attachment issues. With capacity we were able to offer smaller groups (4 to 6 children) in some afternoon programmes for these children. The Urban Villages 'A Place for Me' project's 'Play and Discover' group began to grow a waiting list but funding criteria meant it was only accessible to families living in the Inner communities. In response some Play and Discover programmes were organised in Outer South during the year to help meet these demands but for capacity reasons it was not always possible to have the regular input of our SLT, who along with the Special Needs FSW (funded by Urban Villages) were key to delivering a quality service for these children and their parents.

The SLT also rolled out the 'Building Blocks of Communication' training and resources for Family Support Workers so they could provide support where individual needs had been identified. These programmes promote development and support parent child interaction by providing information, strategies, and support for parents while they are waiting for appointments following referrals to Community Speech and Language or CDC or waiting for ASD referrals to be placed at 2yrs 9mths. Children presenting with the highest needs were referred into Solás for specialist support however for some parents it was too early in their journey to have these discussions and these children have been placed within our own Programmes. Referrals have also been placed for play therapy for children and adult counselling services within the community sector for parents. The number of onward referrals to specialist services including ASD assessment service, CDC, CSLT, Educational Psychology continued to increase and often due to the long waiting lists parents faced long waits for support. Within Sure Start this has required a significant amount of planning and support to ensure these families are receiving the most appropriate support. It also meant the SLT had to prioritise Specialist work, meaning less support was available for Targeted and Universal services.

An arising area of need we had not anticipated/set targets for, was the number of asylum-seeking families, children and pregnant women living in 'contingency accommodation' (formerly hotels) within our catchment area. While there are families coming and going this built to an average of 50 additional children registered with SBSS and families with high levels of need that SBSS supported. SBSS staff contributed to the establishment of, and then attended on a fortnightly basis Family Help clinics for these families. Some of the children were placed in 2-3 year programmes and parents began to come out of the contingency accommodation to attend activities in local communities.

In regard to Family Support the rising cost of living, poor mental health, and additional needs presented as the main reason for 1:1 family support within the local communities and for the Chinese and Roma communities. While the family support team have built strong relationships with their local community groups to explore various types of support and funding for families this become more difficult to access as the numbers requiring support began to build into the winter. Families were regularly signposted to Food Banks and Family Support Hubs for food/vouchers, gas and electric top ups and school uniforms. In the Early Years settings staff made sure there was extra food for the children by providing a 'breakfast' when they arrived as well as a substantial 'snack' before the children went home. Likewise, we upped the quantity of food available at parent and child groups, baby cafes etc.

SBSS Ltd was successful in a bid to DE's Fair Start for the Hope/Speranta project for the Roma community. The Hope Project enabled us to provide early intervention and support services for Roma families from pregnancy to 6 years old/end of P1. The funding started in September 2022, and allowed us to employ a full-time Co-ordinator/FSW worker who is responsible for delivering both Sure Start elements (0-3) and early education (4-6) support for the Roma community. This brought a lot of stability as well as development to this work which was particularly important given the Cost of Living crisis and the continued outworking's of Brexit, with more and more of these families moving into total destitution.

## **South Belfast Sure Start**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2023**

While the continuation of core DE funding was by far the most important resource in delivering services and programmes for families the 'added value' of other funding has been vital in enabling us to respond to emerging needs, grow our services, innovate and pilot, provide more 'out of hours' services and retain some skilled and committed staff.

#### **Quality improvement initiatives within the SBSS**

The family support and early years teams continued to work together to produce evidence for localised planning and evaluation to ensure effective service delivery. Online programme evaluation forms were developed to inform future service delivery within individual areas and the wider Sure Start areas. The family support team within the Inner and Outer areas continued to provide support across geographical areas depending on skill set and capacity along with joint services for parents and children e.g., 'Come Sing with Me', Singing for Health and Parenting Puzzle. Weekly allocation meetings also provided a source of support along with biweekly meetings between family support and early years teams. Within the Perinatal Team it was decided to follow up the initial telephone contact with an email providing the relevant information to ensure that antenatal parents are fully aware of service delivery and at what stage of their pregnancy they should expect to receive this. Early Years teams completed exit questionnaires with parents of children leaving the programmes as part of the evaluation process to enable improvements to service delivery within children's group programmes. For children joining programmes entry questionnaires were completed to help gather parent's hopes and aspirations for them and their child by attending the programme which can then be compared with the exit questionnaires at the end of the academic year.

Along with 3 other Belfast Sure Start programmes in our BFI 'Children's Centre' group we had a successful reaccreditation of our Baby Friendly status. BFI accreditation has been a vehicle that has supported the promotion of breastfeeding or responsive bottle feeding within SBSS.

#### **Significant activities**

South Belfast Sure Start was established in 2001 with 4 aims:

- (1) To Improve Health
- (2) To Improve the Ability to Learn
- (3) To Improve Social and Emotional Well-Being
- (4) To Strengthen Families and Communities

The programme is core funded by the Department of Education (through the Health and Social Care Board) and managed by a Board of Directors that is a partnership of community, voluntary and statutory agencies that work together to improve outcomes for young children and their families in the catchment area.

SBSS has worked with the SPPG at the Department of Health to develop the core Sure Start services within an Outcomes Framework. All activities and services that are commissioned through the core DE funding are recorded on a Sure Start Programmes information system. In addition, SBSS as a Limited Company has obtained funding for programmes and activities that add value or are complementary to the core DE funded services and respond to needs that could not be met within the restrictions of the core annual budget. These accounts provide a clear record of the funding received, expenditure and activities that derive from the core DE funding and other funding sources.

## **South Belfast Sure Start**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2023**

#### **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

##### **Public benefit**

To improve the health and well-being of children aged 0-3 years living in disadvantaged communities or circumstances in South Belfast through the provision of health and social care services to children and their parents/carers as well as to pregnant women.

The direct benefits which flow from this purpose is that through services and information to parents and parents to be, they will be supported to prevent ill health and developmental delay in their children; identify health and developmental issues at an early stage and access other services that their children may require.

These benefits are demonstrated through quarterly and annual activity reports and outcomes-based evaluation. This purpose does not lead to harm.

The beneficiaries of this purpose are:

Children aged 0-3 years and,

their parents and carers and expectant parents primarily living in the South Belfast Sure Start catchment area.

A private benefit to trustees may arise if the knowledge they gain as a trustee in regards, to good governance and health promotion is transferable to another setting.

These benefits are incidental and necessary to ensure the benefit is provided to the beneficiaries.

To improve the social and emotional development of children aged 0-3 years living in disadvantaged communities or circumstances in South Belfast through programmes and services that support parents, in caring for their children.

The direct benefits which flow from this purpose is that by providing family support services to parents, carers and parents to be, they will be supported to develop healthy attachments with their infants, good parenting skills, better family functioning and improved economic and environmental circumstances.

These benefits are demonstrated through quarterly and annual activity reports and outcomes-based evaluation. A risk may arise if through the provision of family support services, a child or parent/carer is harmed by a member of staff or a member of staff is harmed in the course, of their duties. These risks are minimised through the implementation of Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults policies, staff supervision and Lone Working policy and are outweighed by the overall benefits to children and families.

This purpose does not lead to harm.

The beneficiaries of this purpose are:

Children aged 0-3 years,

their parents and carers and expectant mothers and fathers primarily living in the South Belfast Sure Start catchment area.

A private benefit to trustees may arise if the knowledge and experience they gain as a trustee, in regards to good governance and family support is transferable to another setting.

These benefits are incidental and necessary to ensure the benefit is provided to the beneficiaries.

To improve the ability to learn of children aged 0-3 years living in disadvantaged communities or circumstances in South Belfast through the provision of early years services.

The direct benefits which flow from this purpose is that through the provision of early year's services children will be engaged in stimulating play and language enrichment programmes that support their learning and development. These benefits are demonstrated through quarterly and annual activity reports and outcomes-based evaluation. A risk may arise if through the provision of these services a child is harmed by accident or intent, however these risks are minimised through child protection and health and safety procedures and adherence to DHSS&PS regulations and are outweighed by the overall benefits to children. This purpose does not lead to harm.

The beneficiaries of this purpose are:



## **South Belfast Sure Start**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2023**

#### **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

Children aged 0-3 years

Their parents and carers primarily living in the South Belfast Sure Start catchment area.

A private benefit to trustees may arise if the knowledge and experience they gain as a trustee, in regards to good governance and early years is transferable to another setting.

These benefits are incidental and necessary to ensure the benefit is provided to the beneficiaries

#### **FINANCIAL REVIEW**

##### **REVIEW OF YEAR**

The company had net outgoing resources for the year of £30,090 (2022: net outgoing resources of £32,318), which reflected the completion of a number of projects during the year. Unrestricted funds increased by £334, while restricted funds decreased by £30,424.

The charity continues to work to secure income from sources in addition to its core DE funding to provide new or complementary programmes, services and venues that meet emerging local needs but cannot be funded through the core budget. These additional sources of funding are grants received from various bodies as disclosed in note 3 in the financial statements.

##### **Reserves policy**

Best Practice and statutory guidelines recommend that charities hold a justifiable level of reserves in order to remain economically viable in the event of any unforeseen circumstances. The unrestricted funds of South Belfast Sure Start are therefore expendable at the discretion of the Board of Trustees. However, a significant element of the reserves will continue to be held in reserve for a 'worst case scenario' of staff redundancies should the funding from government for SBSS Ltd end.

#### **FUTURE PLANS**

As the year drew to an end it became more and more unclear as to whether Sure Start funding in NI would be maintained or to the same level. Meanwhile planned wages increase to take account of minimum wage rises has added to the proposed salary costs for the incoming year and venue costs/overheads do not seem to be reverting to previous levels. It is therefore almost impossible to make any plans other than to try and maintain the much needed services and programmes we deliver as best as possible

#### **STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

##### **Governing document**

The charity is controlled by its governing document, a deed of trust, and constitutes a limited company, limited by guarantee, as defined by the Companies Act 2006.

##### **Recruitment and appointment of new trustees**

During the period under review the trustees met bi-monthly. Trustees are appointed by nominations made in writing by Partner Organisations. At the General Meeting nominated directors are appointed by election.

None of the directors have any beneficial interest in the company. All of the directors are members of the company and guarantee to contribute £1 in the event of a winding up.

The trustees delegate the day to day running of South Belfast Sure Start to that of the Chief executive officer

## **South Belfast Sure Start**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2023**

## **STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **Structure, governance and management**

The Board of Directors employ the Project Co-ordinator to overview and manage the programme and report back to the committee on activities and developments.

The Project Co-ordinator leads and manages the Finance Director, Early Learning Co-ordinators (Job Share) and Family Support Co-ordinator, with regular supervision to review activities and to ensure they match with the ethos of the organisation and funder requirements. The Finance Director, Early Learning Co-ordinators and Family Support Co-ordinator overview and manage their departments and staff employed therein, with a view of daily activities and services delivered.

### **Related parties**

There were no related party transactions for the year ended 31 March 2023.

### **Risk management**

For ensuring that the principles of good governance are embedded within all aspects of South Belfast Sure Start's operations with management and staff being keenly aware of the Board's responsibility of ensuring that the organisation protects itself from financial exposure and reputational damage, A close working relationship is maintained between the Board and management to ensure that operationally staff are aware of the standards required of them by the Board and the Board are always in a position to provide guidance and support to management in the discharge of their duties. This two way relationship is the key feature of South Belfast Sure Start governance arrangements and is a key strength in the company.

A conscientious approach to ensuring that contractual project requirements are achieved has been maintained at all times both in the accounting period being reported on and since South Belfast Sure Start's establishment. Very tight financial controls on expenditure and all financial commitments are maintained at all times and project staff have been trained and have become experienced in budgetary controls. In both these areas ie Project delivery and financial controls management all staff have established close working relationships with funding organisations to ensure all mandatory standards are consistently achieved. Board representatives also actively engage with funding bodies.

The Board, management and staff are fully aware that the nature of the work in which South Belfast Sure Start is involved can bring with it a high level of scrutiny to ensure that all activities are fully compliant with funding requirements and, therefore, beyond reproach. The Board of South Belfast Sure Start is, therefore, greatly reassured of the company's compliance with the highest of standards of governance on the basis that all monitoring and evaluation of project delivery demonstrates achievement of all funders' objectives and that funders' audits and vouching of financial expenditure and the statutory audit confirm compliance with both probity and regularity in the use of monies received.

## **EVENTS SINCE THE END OF THE YEAR**

Information relating to events since the end of the year is given in the notes to the financial statements.

## **STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES**

The trustees (who are also the directors of South Belfast Sure Start for the purposes of company law) are responsible for preparing the Report of the Trustees and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice) including Financial Reporting Standard 102 "The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland".

**Report of the Trustees**  
**for the Year Ended 31 March 2023**

**STATEMENT OF TRUSTEES' RESPONSIBILITIES - continued**

Company law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charitable company and of the incoming resources and application of resources, including the income and expenditure, of the charitable company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charity SORP;
- make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charitable company will continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charitable company and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charitable company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

In so far as the trustees are aware:

- there is no relevant audit information of which the charitable company's auditors are unaware; and
- the trustees have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditors are aware of that information.

**AUDITORS**

The auditors, Lynn Drake & Co Ltd, will be proposed for re-appointment at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the special provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

Approved by order of the board of trustees on 28 September 2023 and signed on its behalf by:



Joan Henderson - Trustee