

## **South Belfast Sure Start**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2024**

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 2024. 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).

#### **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

##### **Principle activities**

The principal 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 Sure Start catchment area.

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

## **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

### **Significant activities**

#### **Services and Programmes across the year**

The services that SBSS delivered were agreed with SPPG at the outset of the year through 64 different targets covering a range of areas including antenatal, postnatal, family support, play programmes, Developmental Programmes for 2-3 Year Olds, parenting programmes, physical activity, health and wellbeing, ethnic minority services, additional needs and speech/language/communication support.

While we were permitted to decrease some of the targets throughout the year due to staffing issues, by the end of the year all but one of the 64 targets were fully met and frequently exceeded.

In addition to the core funded activities there was a range of complementary services, specific targets and extra capacity delivered through the Urban Villages 'A Place for Me', Roma Hope/Speranza and the STEP projects. Given the wealth of activities, programmes and services it is only possible to highlight some of the key areas of delivery over 2023/24 as follows:

- (1) 200 pregnant women registered with 150 of these using one or more services such as antenatal workshops, Real Birth, Hypnobirthing, Antenatal Yoga, Aqua Yoga and 1:1 support
- (2) 116 new Mums and Dads attended one or more of the 8 Baby Cafes held weekly in 8 different settings. As well as the staff and peer support Baby Cafes offer, they were the main mechanism for delivering programmes such as Baby Massage, Weaning/Introduction to Solids, Baby Sensory, 'Changing Time is Chatting Time' and Song and Rhyme Time in the postnatal period.
- (3) 242 parents/carers with 260 children attended one or more of the 10 parent and toddler groups run weekly across 8 different venues.
- (4) 150 children aged 2-3 years attended yearlong DPf2-3YO's, Child Development or Loving Learning programmes each week for either 3 or 4 sessions. A further 76 children aged 1-2 years attended one of 8 Play and Development programmes over 6-8 weeks.
- (5) The children of 28 families were provided with 1 or 2 morning or afternoon respite childcare sessions a week for between 6 and 15 weeks to support them when the family were going through challenging times.
- (6) 32 children attended one of 6 'Play and Discover' programmes held across the year. These programmes are targeted to children and their parent where there are social communication or developmental concerns and are facilitated by the Special Needs Family Support Worker and Speech and Language Therapist.
- (7) Almost 400 children and 375 parents went on trips or enjoyed a special holiday event organised in their locality such as farms, indoor play centres, petting farm visits and outdoor parks and beaches.
- (8) Almost 2000 home or centre based 1:1 visits to for a wide range of purposes including initial registrations, generic family support, home based programmes such as SLC and behaviour management, support with accessing specialist services, discussion of children's progress in settings and emotional support/containment.
- (9) Over 500 families experiencing financial, and poverty related issues were supported with resources or helped to gain access to these through community partners, including food bank referrals, food and fuel vouchers, prams and baby equipment, children and adult clothes, books and toys.

## South Belfast Sure Start

### Report of the Trustees for the Year Ended 31 March 2024

#### **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

(10) 40 different programmes (in addition to ante and postnatal) were delivered within the themes of health and well-being, personal development, parenting, physical activity and nutrition and cooking with up to 250 parents attending at least one of these programmes.

#### **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.

## **South Belfast Sure Start**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2024**

#### **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

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:

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

#### **ACHIEVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE**

##### **Values**

South Belfast Sure Start is an organisation that seeks to treat everybody with fairness and equality. We strive to be

open, honest and respectful to all. We endeavour to involve and empower, communities, families, children and staff to grow and develop. As an organisation we will actively listen, act with integrity and hold ourselves accountable.

The programme is core funded by the Department of Education (through the SPPG/DoH) 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.

## **ACHIEVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE**

### **Budget Context**

Unfortunately, 2023 opened with huge uncertainty around both core DE funding and other government funding streams. Staff, the Board of Directors and current and past parents coalesced with other Belfast Sure Start programmes to lobby strongly against suggested cuts of 20%. In early June we received confirmation that budgets would not be cut and that we would be on a flatline budget. However, with the annual increase in the Minimum Wage and high inflationary costs on goods and services this was a cut in real terms and inevitably led to a reduction in services and unfilled posts/hours within the organisation in 2023/24.

The majority of staff received no pay uplift in this financial year. The TEO's Urban Villages revenue programme also concluded meaning that the 'A Place for Me' programme ended. However, two other programmes - STEP and the Roma Hope project did receive sufficient funding to continue. In addition to the reduction in the number of programmes (including the UV Special Needs programme) and places for children, the impact of this funding uncertainty has been on staff morale and financial planning.

While initially staff were upbeat about their part in fending off heavy cuts, once again the general uncertainty played a role in some skilled staff leaving the organisation for other jobs. Replacing Early Years staff in particular became increasingly difficult, which again has an impact on the services for children.

### **Addressing Access and Participation**

SBSS continued to work throughout the year to improve the access to, and engagement of, all families and carers living in the catchment area. This includes:

- (1) Fathers/male carers - the number of fathers registered rose again this year to 485 with 40% of this number actively using services. The increase is largely due to more fathers registering along with their partners antenatally and attending the workshops and programmes which are often held in the evenings or weekends to facilitate that. While some of these Dads continue to engage in services postnatally such as Baby Cafes when they can, active involvement does tend to fall off as the children get older.
- (2) Newcomer families - South Belfast is a very diverse community and a third of registered families are from another country and/or ethnic minorities. This includes asylum seekers living in 'contingency accommodation' such as former hotels and B&B's and family support staff have been involved in the multi-agency Family Help service and supporting these families to access services in local Sure Start venues. SBSS continued delivering 2 targeted ethnic minority programmes for Chinese and Roma families.
- (3) Children with additional needs - only a minority of children with additional needs will have a formal diagnosis before they turn 4. As parents and their children often find it overwhelming to engage in busy drop-in services like parent and toddler groups, SBSS has continued to develop activities and programmes that cater specifically to the needs and development of these children. This has included the Play and Discover groups, small Child Development Programmes of 5-6 children, support in the home and promoting the use of contracted places with our partner agency Sólás (a special needs charity).

## **South Belfast Sure Start**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2024**

#### **ACHIEVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE** **Quality improvement initiatives within 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 at the end of each programme are used 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.

The Perinatal Team held 2 x focus groups in inner city areas where the take up of antenatal programmes are lower, with parents of babies who did not use services antenatally, and have adapted their service delivery in response to this feedback. 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. The Outcomes Star tool is used by FSW's with families using 1:1 services.

Along with the 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.

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

The company had net outgoing resources for the year of £824 (2023: net outgoing resources of £30,090), which reflected the completion of a number of projects during the year. Unrestricted funds increased by £10,846, while restricted funds decreased by £11,670.

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 4 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



## **South Belfast Sure Start**

### **Report of the Trustees** **for the Year Ended 31 March 2024**

#### **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

##### **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 2024.

##### **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 Starts 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.

## South Belfast Sure Start

### Report of the Trustees for the Year Ended 31 March 2024

#### **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".

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:

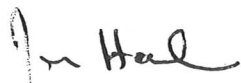
- there is no relevant audit information of which the charitable company's auditors are unaware; and
- the trustees have taken all steps that they ought to have taken to make themselves aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the auditors are aware of that information.

#### **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 19 September 2024 and signed on its behalf by:



Joan Henderson - Trustee