

A.B.B.E.Y. SURE START
THE TRUSTEES AND FINANCIAL
THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH

TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT

The Trustees, who are also directors for the purposes of company law, have pleasure in presenting their annual report together with the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2025 which are also prepared to meet the requirements for a directors' report and accounts for Companies Act 2006 purposes. The Trustees confirm that the financial statements comply with the requirements of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 and Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice which applies 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 2015).

Reference & Administrative Details

Reference and administrative details are shown in the schedule of members and professional advisers on page I of the financial statements.

Directors and Trustees

The directors of the charitable company are its trustees for the purpose of charity law.

The Directors and trustees who served the charity during the period were as follows:

Martin walls, Chairperson

Amanda Johnston

Joyce Rainey

Claire Humphries

Leah Rea

Karen Kerr

Structure, Governance & Management

Governing Document

The charity is controlled by its governing document, a Memorandum and Articles of Association, and constitutes a limited company, limited by guarantee, as defined by the Companies Act 2006. Each member has agreed to contribute £1 in the event of a compulsory winding up. It is registered as a charity with The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

The charity is a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. It is a company incorporated under the Companies Act. The charity is managed under the control of the management committee. The day to day running of the charity is carried out by the Project Manager, Cathy Todd.

Appointment of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is responsible for the overall governance of the charity. Trustees are elected at the Annual General Meeting by the members present and the total number of Trustees shall not be less than 3.

Trustees shall hold office until the next Annual General Meeting following his/her appointment. A retiring Trustee shall be eligible for re-election.

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The Trustees shall have the power at any time and from time to time to appoint any person to be a Trustee, either to fill a casual vacancy or as an addition to the existing Trustees. Any Trustee so appointed shall hold office until the next following Annual General Meeting and shall then be eligible for election.

Trustee Induction and training

New Trustees receive an induction pack which supports due diligence and supports good record keeping. They undergo an induction to brief them on their legal obligations under charity and company law, the Charities Commission guidance on public benefit, content of the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the board of trustees and decision-making processes, policies and procedures, the business plan and recent financial performance of the charity. Trustees are encouraged to attend appropriate external training events where these will facilitate the undertaking of their role.

Organisation

The Board of Trustees meet 3 monthly, and delegates certain responsibilities to the Project Manager. The Project Manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of the affairs of the charity and for implementing the policies and operational plans as agreed by the Board of Trustees. Between meetings of the Board of Trustees, the Project Manager reports to the Chairperson.

Related parties

None of the Trustees receive remuneration or other benefit from their work with the Charity. Any connection between a trustee or senior manager of the charity to related parties must be disclosed to the full Board of Trustees in the same way as any other contractual relationship with a third party. There were no such disclosures in the current year.

Risk Management

The Trustees have a risk management strategy which comprises:

- An annual review of the risks the charity may face.
- The establishment of systems and procedures to mitigate those risk identified and
- The implementation of procedures designed to minimise any potential impact on the charity should those risks materialise

This work has identified that financial sustainability is a major financial risk for the charity. A key element in the management of financial risk is via the reserves policy. Attention has also been focused on non-financial risks arising from fire, health and safety of employees, volunteers and scheme users. In providing access and opportunities to people and children, the Charity recognises that there are potential risks to children and vulnerable adults. A key element in the management of non-financial risk is the establishment and implementation of a robust chart of policies and procedures including Access NI Disclosure Check, Child Protection Policy and the renewal and training of staff in this area.

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The Trustees are satisfied that the necessary policies and procedures are in place to safeguard participants, and ensure that the benefits provided outweigh any potential harm.

Objectives and Activities

The charity's objectives are to enhance the development and education of children below the statutory school age and to advance education, relieve poverty, sickness and distress among those in the necessitous circumstances in Newtownabbey and its environs and to provide recreational and leisure facilities in the interests of social welfare for those inhabitants of the area of benefit without distinction of age, sex, special need, race or political, religious or other opinions, who are in necessitous circumstances.

Future and principal funding sources

Sure Start is solely government funded and funding is allocated by the Department of Education. Projects are jointly managed by the Department of Education and the Childcare Partnerships (HSCB/SPPG) who oversee allocations and monitor expenditure.

Charitable Purposes

- To promote the benefit of the parents and children of Newtownabbey without distinction of race or political, religious or other opinions by associating together with the said parents/children and local authorities, voluntary and other organisations in a common effort to advance education, improve health and well-being and to provide facilities in the interests of social and emotional welfare for recreation and leisure time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life for the said parents/children.
- To relieve the suffering and distress of parents/children who by reason of health, social or economic circumstances, have need of such facilities.
- To help parents/children in the area to reach their full potential thereby offering something back to their community.

Public Benefit Statement

A.B.B.E.Y Sure Start is a government funded initiative, targeting children under 4 years old. It is aimed at giving everyone a good start in life and is about a long-term investment. Research has indicated that where children have access to early intervention and play opportunities it will help their development through school and adult life. The overall aim of the organisation is to improve the wellbeing and life opportunities of young children under four, through better health, childcare and educational opportunities so that children can flourish when they enter school. The project operates within the defined boundaries of Abbey, Carnmoney 1, Cloughfern, Coole, Dunanney, Glengormley 2, Monkstown, Mossley 2, Whitehouse and Valley electoral wards.

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Achievements and Performance

A.B.B.E.Y. Sure Start's main office is located at 440 Shore Road and the Project continues to deliver programmes and services from 6 other outreach sites located at Merville Garden Village, the Dunanney Centre, Abbots Cross Primary School, St. James' Primary School, Monkstown Village Centre and Abbeytown Square. A range of venues are also hired across the catchment area to deliver programmes. All programmes and services are designed to meet local need and improve outcomes for children and families. Outcomes are related to health, social well-being and education and also to have an impact on strengthening communities.

At the end of quarter 4 we met the majority of the 127 targets detailed in our annual plan. We fully met 45% of the targets, exceeded 52% of the targets and partially met 2% of the targets. The small percentage of targets that we didn't fully meet were mostly due to not having the target number of attendees, eg, a target of 8 parents attending a programme and 7 attended.

Uptake of services across antenatal, children, mothers, fathers and families exceeded the SureStart Northern Ireland averages, with the highest percentage being 93% of ante natal registrations.

A key success indicator is getting children registered before their 1st birthday, the target is 70% and we achieved 71%. We have also had an increase in the use of the family Stars outcome measurement tool.

Staff have noted a significant increase in parents presenting with severe emotional and mental health difficulties. This has increased the level of work within the Family Support team through provision of intensive 1-1 support.

FSW's have been continuing to sign post families to 27 different organisations/services including food banks, autism services, education services, baby basics, mental health services, Barnardo's, CBT, GP, Health Visitor, Parenting NI, Triangle Housing, home safety, Employers for childcare, Advice NI, CITHRAH. A high percentage of signposting and support is with food banks and autism/education services.

There was an increase in registrations from the Health Visiting team following on from staff attending a staff meeting to provide information and promote SureStart services, however this has reduced significantly. Parents are also reporting difficulties with contacting health Visitors as there is no longer a direct phone line. Many also comment that they have no idea who their Health Visitor is and seldom see the same person twice. The majority of registrations have now reverted back to face to face home visits. Families are continuing to access Food Banks, Pallet Scheme through the DFC, baby basics and Save the Children funding through the Family Support hub.

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We have been delivering one of our Developmental Programmes in the Monkstown area for the past 11 years in a building owned by the NIHE. It is in a row of commercial premises, and we are the only remaining tenants and there are only a few tenants in the flats above. Unfortunately for us the Housing Executive have plans to demolish the buildings and we were given notice to vacate the premises by the 31st of July 2025, however we entered further negotiations and NIHE have agreed to extend our rental agreement until 31st August 2026 with the caveat that if the building becomes unsafe, we would have to vacate immediately. This continues to present us with a significant problem as there are no other suitable premises in the area that wouldn't require capital monies to allow for refurbishment and to meet requirements for registration by Social Services. I have approached the principal of the local Primary School to enquire about vacant classrooms but unfortunately all rooms are being fully used. She indicated that she would love to have us on site if EA would provide a mobile classroom. We have been in contact with local Councillors who are trying to negotiate another year in the premises as there are no immediate plans for demolition and redevelopment of the site. Another of our Developmental Programmes is delivered from a classroom in Abbots Cross Primary School and due to developments within the school we have been advised that they plan to move us to another classroom next year which will have financial implications for us and we are currently in ongoing discussions regarding this issue.

We previously identified that the number of children presenting with additional needs in the Developmental Programme for 2-3 year olds was increasing year on year and that for some children this may not be the most suitable environment to support the specific individual needs of children. This programme continues to be an integral element of SureStart services and demand is increasing. Feedback from parents highlights how much they appreciate the additional support provided to both them and their child particularly in navigating the self-referral form in relation to assessment. Due to the fact that we only have 2 members of staff we have kept the numbers low for all sessions and are offering more sessions than originally planned to accommodate all 9 children. We are attempting to try and recruit for an additional Programme Practitioner again.

We are continuing to register families in our expansion area and deliver a wide range of programmes to support families. We are offering programmes in Mossley Church and they are all well attended. Service delivery has been quite challenging as we were unable to recruit to all posts in the expansion area and have had to use core staff and bring in outside facilitators.

Plans for the Future

This is a small synopsis of the activity we have provided from April 2024 to March 2025, and, we look forward to progressing and developing relationships with the children and families in the area to ensure they can easily access our services.

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