Listening to
Little Heart

Business Plan

Our Vision for the Future

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Executive Summary

Mission

Mental health concerns among young children are rising, yet many lack the resources or skills to express their emotions. “ Listening to Little Hearts” - LTLH is a new NPO dedicated to supporting Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 children (age from 3 to 7) through storybook listening sessions to promote children’s mental well-being. This initiative leverages the power of storytelling to help children articulate emotions, build resilience, and develop social-emotional skills. We use carefully curated storybooks and interactive techniques to help children express and develop healthy emotional intelligence.

Vision

Our vision is a world where every child has the opportunity to be heard, understood, and emotionally supported through the transformative power of storytelling.

Objectives

We aim to collaborate with schools, libraries, and community centres to introduce guided reading sessions led by trained facilitators. The program will include interactive discussions, activities, and parental engagement strategies to create a sustainable impact.Train volunteers, parents, and educators in using storytelling as a tool for children’s emotional well-being. Advocate for early intervention in mental health through public awareness campaigns and resources.

This business plan outlines our strategy, market analysis, funding model, and implementation framework to ensure the long-term success of LTLH.

Organisational Introduction

Background

Early year children's mental health has become a pressing global issue. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 8% of children and 15%adolescents worldwide experience mental health conditions, yet many cases remain undiagnosed (WHO, 2022). Early intervention is crucial, as emotional well-being during early years lays the foundation for lifelong mental health. The National Institute of Mental Health (2021) emphasises that early assessment and intervention are essential when addressing mental health concerns in children.

(source: WHO, 2022)

Legal Structure

LTLH is a registered unincorporated Association- non-profit organisation governed.

Our Core Values

At Listening to Little Heart (LTLH), our core values guide everything we do. Empathy is at the heart of our mission. Every child deserves to be heard and storytelling provides a safe space for them to express their emotions. Inclusion drives our commitment to making mental health support accessible to all children, regardless of background or circumstances, aligning with UNICEF's call for universal early childhood development support (Hogg, *et. el.,* 2023). We embrace innovation, innovation, leveraging storytelling as a proven tool for emotional well-being, supported by research showing that narratives help children process feelings and build resilience (Health, 2024). Finally, we believe in the power of community, strong partnerships with parents, educators and mental health professionals amplify our impact and ensure sustainable change. Research indicates that effective collaboration among these stakeholders enhances children's mental health outcomes. For instance, when families and school staff work together, they can ensure that young people have what they need to be healthy, happy and ready to learn (WestEd, 2024). Through these values, we strive to create a supportive environment weather every child's emotional well-being is nurtured.

Part 1

Problem Statement and Needs Assessment

The Growing Concern of Children's Mental Health

Children's mental health has become a growing concern, with studies indicating that 1 in 6 U.S. children aged 2-8 have a diagnosed mental behavioural, or developmental disorder (CDC, 2024). However, many young children struggle to articulate their emotions due to limited verbal skills, which can lead to hidden stress, anxiety and behavioural issues that often go unnoticed or misunderstood (National Institute of Mental Health, 2021). Without proper emotional support, these challenges can escalate, affecting a child's ability to form relationships, succeed academically, and regulate emotions effectively. Research from the Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute (n.d) emphasises that the early years are a crucial period for emotional development and early intervention can significantly reduce the risk of long-term mental health challenges. By identifying and addressing emotional difficulties in childhood, caregivers and educators can foster resilience, equipping children with the tools they need for lifelong well-being.

(source: Gold, 2013)

Gaps in the Current System

Despite growing awareness of children's mental health, early intervention programs tailored for children under 8 remain limited, leaving many young children without the necessary support during their critical developmental years. Emotional literacy, the ability to recognise, understand, and manage emotions. It is often lacking in both school and homes, making it difficult for children to express their feelings in a healthy way (Early Intervention Foundation, 2022). Additionally, many parents and teacher struggle to identify and address emotional distress in young children, as symptoms of anxiety, stress, and behavioural challenges can be subtle and easily overlooked (APA,2018). Without proper training and resources, caregivers may unintentionally dismiss early warning signs, increasing the risk of long-term mental health difficulties. Expanding access to early intervention programs and integrating emotional literacy education into early years settings can help bridge these gaps, ensuring children receive the emotional support they need from an early age

Part 1

Problem Statement and Needs Assessment

The Role of Storytelling in Mental Health

Enhancing emotional intelligence in young children is essential for their overall well-being, as it helps them develop self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation. Research by Yabe et.el., (2018) highlights that early exposure to emotionally enriching experiences, such as storytelling, can significantly improve a child's ability to recognise and manage emotions. Additionally, encouraging self-expression in a non-intimidating way allows children to communicate their thoughts and feelings more freely, reducing anxiety and building confidence. Double Care ABA (2024) suggests that creative activities, such as storytelling and journaling, provide a safe space for children to articulate their emotions. Moreover, shared reading experiences strengthen parent-child bonds, fostering trust and emotional security. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2024), interactive reading sessions not only enhance literacy skills but also create meaningful moments of connection, improving a child's social and emotional development. These findings emphasise the importance of integrating storytelling and shared reading into early year education and home environments to nurture emotional well-being.

(source: Khan, 2019)

Unmet Needs

Despite the benefits of early emotional education, schools and families often lack the resources to implement structured metal health programs. According to Wang *et. el.,* 2023, only 38% of children and adolescents with any mental disorder receive treatment. This statistic highlights a significant gap in mental health care for young individuals, emphasising the need for increased access to and provision of mental health services.

Solution and Approach

Listening Through Little Hearts (LTLH) addresses the gap in children's mental health support through a story-based listening model that fosters emotional literacy in an engaging and accessible way. By using curated books that explore emotions, we create a safe space where children can express their feelings naturally through storytelling. Our approach includes interactive discussions that help children articulate their emotions, along with creative activities such as art, drama, and play-based learning to reinforce emotional understanding. To ensure long-term impact, we provide training and resources for parents, teachers, and volunteers, equipping them with the skills to continue meaningful emotional conversations beyond our sessions. By empowering both children and their caregivers, LTLH nurtures emotional growth, resilience, and a supportive community where every child feels heard and understood.

(source: stockcake, n.d).

Program Structure

Storytelling and Listening Sessions

Our sessions are held in accessible spaces such as schools, libraries, and community centers, ensuring that children from various backgrounds can easily participate. We work with small groups of 5-10 children, allowing for a more personalised and focused experience. Each session is led by trained facilitators who guide the children through age-appropriate stories that address common emotions like fear, sadness, joy, anger or different transition situations. These stories help children connect with their emotions, articulate their feelings, and foster emotional understanding in a supportive environment. After listening to the story, we encourage open discussions and self-expression with children.

Volunteer Training Program

We focus on equipping volunteers with essential storytelling techniques and a foundational understanding of child psychology. Through comprehensive training, volunteers learn how to use engaging storytelling methods to capture children's attention and create an emotional connection, while also understanding the developmental stages and emotional needs of children. This combination allows volunteers to create a supportive and nurturing environment, where children can freely express themselves and feel heard. By arming volunteers with these skills, we ensure they are well-prepared to help children navigate their emotions in a safe and meaningful way.

Parental and Educator Workshops

We aim to empower parents by helping them incorporate storytelling into emotional conversations at home, creating an open environment where children feel comfortable expressing their feelings. By guiding parents on how to use stories to discuss emotions. We foster deeper emotional connections with the family. In parallel , we are committed to equipping teachers with practical tools to support mental health in the classroom, enabling them to identify early signs of emotional distress and provide effective support. Through training, teachers learn how to integrate emotional literacy into their daily routines, creating a classroom environment where mental well-being is prioritised and children's emotional needs are met.

Community Partnerships

We believe in the power of collaboration to create a wider impact on children's mental health. By partnering with schools, libraries, and mental health organisations, we are able to extend our reach and provide accessible emotional support to children across various communities. Through these collaborations, we aim to develop a network of trained facilitators throughout the UK, ensuring that our story-based listening model is implemented consistently and effectively. This network will empower facilitators with the necessary tools and knowledge to guide children in their emotional development, fostering resilience and well-being on a national scale.

Part 2

Implementation Plan

Year 1 Goals

Objevctive	Action Step	Timeline
Pilot Program	Partner with 3 schools and libraries	Q1
Volunteer recruitment	Train first cohort of facilitators and volunteers	Q2
Impact assessment	Conduct surveys and feedback analysis	Q3
Expand reach	Add 10 more community sites	Q4

Year 2 :

Expend to 10+ schools and libraries,secure additional funding.

Year 3 :

Establish long-term partnerships, evaluate impact.

Market Analysis

Our program is designed to support young children (ages 3-7) who may be experiencing emotional distress or simply need guidance in understanding their feelings. In addition to helping children, we also target parents, teachers, and caregivers, providing them with the tools and knowledge to support children's mental well-being effectively. Unlike many existing mental health programs, which often overlook early childhood, our approach is preventive, engaging, and child-friendly, using storytelling as a natural way to foster emotional literacy. What sets up apart is our low-cost, community-based model, making emotional support accessible to all families, regardless of their background. By empowering children through storytelling rather than clinical intervention, we create a safe, nurturing environment where emotional resilience can flourish.

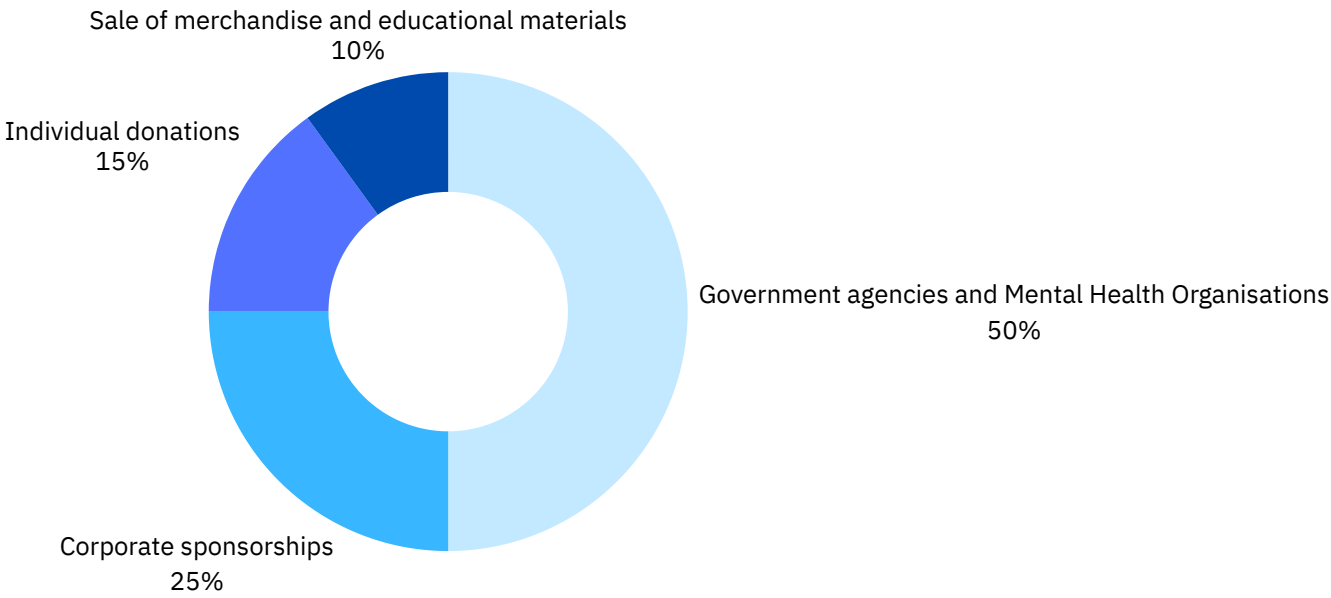
Market Size and Demand in the UK

With over 4.5 million primary school children in the UK(Department for Education, 2024), the need for early mental health support is greater than ever. One in five children aged 8-25 is estimated to have a probable mental disorder (NHS Digital, 2023), highlighting the urgent demand for accessible emotional well-being programs. As mental health challenges among young children continue to rise, there is growing public and professional support for government-backed emotional literacy programs (Hughes, 2024). Addressing mental health from an early age is crucial in preventing long-term issues, and integrating emotional support into children's daily lives through storytelling provides a natural, engaging solution to this growing crisis.

Competitor and Gap Analysis

Despite growing awareness of children's mental health, existing initiatives often fall short in meeting the emotional needs of Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1 children. School counselling services, while beneficial, face significant challenges, including long waiting lists and limited accessibility. According to NHS Digital (2021), only 36% of children with a probable mental disorder receive the necessary professional support leaving many without timely intervention. Traditional reading programs, although widely available in schools and libraries, primarily focus on literacy rather than structured emotional learning. Research by Xu(2023) highlights that reading alone does not automatically foster emotional intelligence, emphasising the need for guided discussions to help children process emotions. Additionally, online mental health resources, such as digital therapy apps and self-help platforms, are not tailored for young children who rely more on interactive and experiential learning (NHS Confederation, 2023). These gaps highlight the need for an initiative like Listening to Little Hearts (LTLH), which integrates structured storytelling sessions with emotional learning, ensuring that young children receive accessible, engaging, and developmentally appropriate mental health support

Funding



The funding for Listening to Little Hearts (LTLH) is drawn from a diverse range of sources, ensuring sustainability and broad community support. A significant portion (50%) comes from grants provided by government agencies and mental health organisations, including programs like the "Creative Health & Wellbeing" plan by Arts Council England (2022) or National Lottery Community Fund (2022) and various mental health-focused grant initiatives. Corporate sponsorships account for 25% of the funding, with businesses supporting LTLH's mission through financial contributions and in-kind donations. Crowdfunding campaigns and individual donations contribute 15%, leveraging community-driven platforms to engage supporters who resonate with LTLH's vision. Lastly, 10% of funding is generated through the sale of merchandise and educational materials, as well as fee-based workshops and training sessions designed for parents and educators. This multi-stream funding approach ensures financial stability while expanding the reach and impact of LTLH's programs.

Financial Projections

Estimated Budget for Year 1

Funding Sources (income)	Estimated Amount (£)
Government Grants (e.g. National Lottery Community Fund & Arts Council England	£30,000
Mental Health & Wellbeing Grants (e.g.YoungMinds and The Baring Foundation)	£20,000
Corporate Sponsorships and Donations	£20,000
Community Fundraising & Crowdfunding	£10,000
Sale of Merchandise and Education Materials	£2,000
Total Estimated Income	**£92,000**

Expense	Project Cost (£)
Staff salaries	£50,000
Book purchases and materials	£10,000
Training workshops and facilitator fees	£10,000
Marketing and outreach	£10,000
Operational costs (venue rental, admin)	£12,000
Total Estimated Expense	**£92,000**

Impart Measurement and Evaluation

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Listening to Little Hearts (LTLH) measures its impact through key indicators that track children's participation, emotional growth, and community engagement. Each session serves a set number of children, ensuring a manageable group size that allows for meaningful interaction and personalised attention. Emotional growth is assessed through pre-and post-session surveys, incorporating teacher and parent feedback to gauge improvements in self-expression, empathy, and emotional regulation. These assessments help identify progress in children's ability to recognise and manage emotions effectively. Addintonaly, parental and educator engagement is a crucial factor, with attendance at workshops and feedback surveys providing insights into how well caregivers and teachers integrate LTLH's approaches into daily interactions. Evidence-based evaluation from similar programs highlight the importance of structured reflection and guided discussions in fostering emotional intelligence in young children.

Long-Term Impact Goals

Listening to Little Hearts's (LTLH) long-term goals focus on fostering emotional well-being and expanding access to emotional literacy education. A primary objective is the reduction of childhood anxiety and emotional distress, measured through ongoing assessments of participants' emotional resilience and coping strategies. By increasing awareness and accessibility, LTLH aims to integrate emotional literacy into early education settings, ensuring that children, parents and educators have the necessary tools to support emotional development. To sustain this impact, LTLH seeks to establish a nationwide network of trained facilitators, equipping educators and community leaders with research-based methods to guide children's emotional growth. Through these efforts, LTLH envisions a future where emotional well-being is prioritised as an essential part of childhood development.

Partnership and Stakeholder Engagement

Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement play a pivotal role in the success of Listening to Little Hearts (LTLH). Our key collaborators include schools and preschools, where we integrate our programs into existing curricula to foster emotional literacy from an early age. Libraries and community centers provide welcoming spaces to host storytelling sessions, ensuring accessibility to all children. We also collaborate with mental health organisations that offer valuable expertise and referrals, supporting children in need of further mental health services. Partnering with publishing companies and authors allows us to secure book sponsorships, bringing high-quality, age-appropriate literature into our sessions. In addition to these collaborations, we are committed to advocacy and public awareness, leveraging social media campaigns to promote the importance of early childhood mental health and organising annual storytelling festivals to engage and connect with the community, raising awareness and creating a supportive environment for emotional well-being.

Policies and Legislative Documents

Listening to Little Hearts (LTLH) aligns with several UK policies, legislative frameworks, and research focused on children's mental health and emotional development.

The UK government's Children and Young People's Mental Health Policy emphasises a whole school approach to mental health, ensuring that emotional well-being is integrated into educational settings. This is outlined in the Department for Education's guidance on promoting and supporting mental health in schools and colleges (Department for Education, 2021). Additionally, the Health and Social Care Act 2012 enshrines the principle of parity of esteem, ensuring that mental health is given equal priority to physical health, forming the foundation for many policies supporting children's emotional well-being (Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition, 2023). Research further supports the importance of early intervention, with studies highlighting the role of storytelling in early childhood education as a tool for emotional reflection, empathy development, and self-understanding (booktrust.org.uk, 2024). Furthermore, a systematic review indicates that storytelling interventions play a significant role in developing protective factors, such as resilience, helping children navigate challenges and build emotional strength (Ramamurthy et. el., 2023). These policies and research findings align with Listening to Little Hearts (LTLH), reinforcing its commitment to enhancing children's mental health through storytelling.

Risk Management

Listening to Little Hearts may face several challenges in its mission to promote emotional literacy among children. Limited funding is a significant hurdle, as it may constrain the ability to offer programs to underserved communities or expand nationwide. To mitigate this LTLH actively pursues a diversified funding strategy, including grants, corporate sponsorships, and crowdfunding, while also exploring partnerships with like-minded organisations to share resources. Resistance from schools may arise due to competing priorities or a lack of understanding of the program's benefits. To address this, LTLH focuses on building strong relationships with school administrators and demonstrating the positive impact of emotional literacy on student outcomes, providing evidence-based research and case studies to gain support. Lastly, maintaining program quality as the organisation grows can be challenging. LTLH addresses this by establishing a network of trained facilitators who undergo regular professional development and continuous feedback loops to ensure that the program's core values and effectiveness are upheld across all regions. By proactively tackling these challenges, LTLH aims to sustain high-quality programming and broad support for its mission.

Conclusion

Listening to Little Hearts aims to transform children's emotional well-being through the power of storytelling. By providing a safe and engaging space for emotional expression, we can empower young minds and build a stronger foundation for lifelong mental health.

"Every child has a story to tell, and sometimes, they just need someone to listen. Through storytelling we can nurture resilient, emotionally intelligent future generations."

There are several ways you can help make a difference with Listening to Little Hearts (LTLH). You can volunteer to become a trained storyteller, playing a key role in delivering emotional support to children through engaging and impactful storytelling sessions. By choosing to donate, you'll be directly supporting our programs and outreach efforts, ensuring that children, families, and communities can benefit from accessible mental health resources. Additionally, you can partner with us to help expand our reach, bringing our storytelling-based mental health support to more children across the UK, fostering emotional literacy, and creating a lasting positive impact on children's well-being. Together, we can create a world where very child's emotions are understood and supported.

Listening to
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