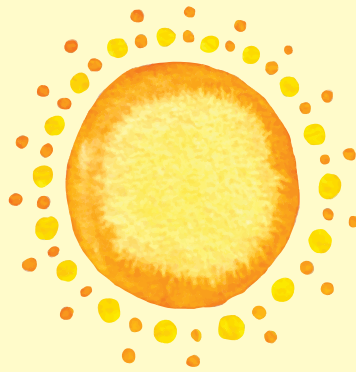


LIGHT TO LIFE





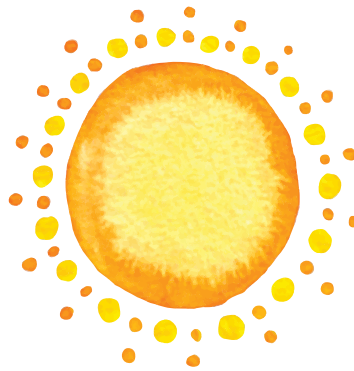


CONCEPT PAPER AND ACTION GUIDELINES FOR THE LIGHT TO LIFE PROGRAM

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PREAMBLE

Poverty has a profound effect on children. A large number of them from the most socially and economically disadvantaged communities do not enjoy a normal childhood. They are not privileged enough to access quality education, nutritious food, affordable health care, and other basic needs for their growth and development. The Mar Thoma Mission has initiated a program called 'Light to Life' for those children to improve the quality of their lives and give them a better future. It is designed to nurture children's mental, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. It focuses on improving their academic performance and achieving all-inclusive development while recognizing the importance of their interests and needs and protecting their rights. Many assigned agencies at different locations in the country are executing this program for children with regional program units.

To ensure this program is implemented effectively, the Program Units are adequately facilitated with physical infrastructure that has enough space, teaching and learning aids, sports and games materials, and other instruments. School-going children who fall under the category of less privileged come to these units every day after school hours to acquire academic and non-academic skills. Many other program interventions are also implemented for children's overall development. Of course, each unit is expected to create a stimulating environment for the children to have a positive learning experience.

This program is wholeheartedly supported by the congregations and well-wishers of Mar Thoma community in India and overseas, who have been continually inspired to contribute a minimal amount to execute this program. Their response has been overwhelming, and the number of sponsors is gradually increasing. The financial support thus raised enables the Light to Life Program to reach many underprivileged children through projects operated in different parts of this country.

A perceptive vision and mission statement, including the aims and objectives of the program, have been framed. However, a well-written program concept is crucial for the success of any such initiative. As such, this paper outlines the concept of 'Light to Life,' emphasizing a holistic and integrated child development approach, which is the crux of this program. This concept paper does not discuss just one or two aspects of the child's development but looks at a child holistically. It upholds children's rights, considering their needs and interests. At the same time, it strongly advocates family and community empowerment through active participation and involvement. This concept paper intends to apprise all those responsible for implementing the Light to Life Program, especially the project management and staff. They are expected to assimilate and put into action for efficient and effective program implementation.

PART - I : CONCEPT PAPER

BACKGROUND AND FORMATION OF THE 'LIGHT TO LIFE PROGRAM'

Over the last many years, the Mar Thoma community has been extensively engaged in humanitarian service to relieve the poor from distress, poverty, injustice, and illiteracy. As part of its mission to the poor and needy, the Mar Thoma Community has phenomenally worked in education, healthcare, and community development, including emergency relief work. Since education is a powerful tool for empowerment, several educational centers have been established in different locations in the country so that less privileged children can access quality education. It has also widely promoted healthcare initiatives and extended support to the hospitals and clinics, enabling access to better medical services for the poor. Hence, the Mar Thoma Mission has initiated the 'Light to Life Program' with this spirit.

The words 'Light to Life' are synonymous with the motto of Mar Thoma denomination, 'Lighted to Lighten'. This means to shed light on the lives of lesser-privileged children and enable them to

transform their lives and those of their families and communities. Originally, it was an initiative of the Diocese of North America and Europe of the Mar Thoma Community to reach out to the unreached with the message of love and spirit.

The initiation of the 'Light to Life Program' has greatly inspired many to share their resources towards the education and well-being of needy children in India. A registered organization; the Mar Thoma Mission Board (MMB) and other similar type of entities such as the Canadian Mar Thoma Regional Committee (CMRC) of the Diocese of North America in New York, and Council of Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe & UK (COMPE) of the Diocese of UK-Europe and Africa have set up the sponsorship program to raise funds for this purpose. They do this because they firmly believe that sharing financial resources to educate children is to live a life of compassion and mercy to others in need.



VISION & MISSION



VISION

The Vision of the Light to Life Program is to create a stimulating environment conducive to children's holistic growth, utilizing their full potential, develop them into creatively productive and responsible individuals, and promote peace, justice, and equality in Society.



MISSION

The Mission is to reach out to the children and youth of socially and economically disadvantaged communities irrespective of their caste, creed, colour, gender, or religion and provide them with opportunities for quality education and holistic development, ensuring a better future.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To provide opportunities for a child's physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual development.
- To enhance academic performance and develop better study skills by offering remedial teaching and personalized attention.
- To create an inspiring environment for the child's holistic development and equip the centre with adequate teaching, learning and play materials and other basic infrastructural facilities.
- To provide adequate nutritional support and primary healthcare and imbibe health habits, hygiene practices and self-help skills.
- To motivate the child to develop self-confidence, self-esteem, and a positive self-image.
- To provide various developmentally tuned non-academic activities to improve social and emotional well-being.
- To raise awareness amongst families and communities about the importance of education, health, and rights, especially safety and protection of children.
- To network with panchayats, local government bodies, CBOs, other NGOs, and service
- To seek support and guidance from other like-minded organizations.
- To ensure community participation for sustainable outcomes and increased social support and trust.
- To empower and develop the community for their social and economic advancement.
- To raise resources locally and aim for self-reliance.

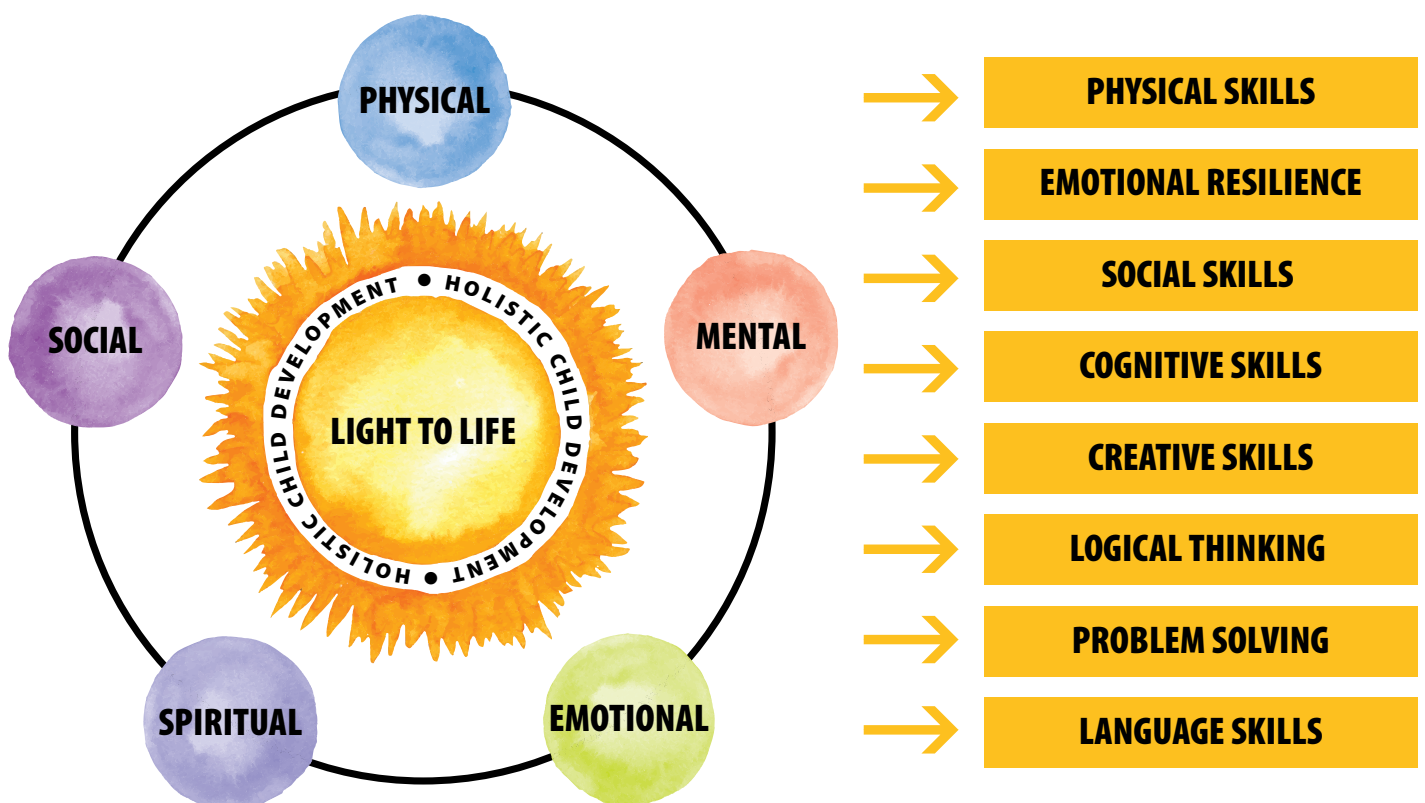
THE CONCEPT OF THE 'LIGHT TO LIFE PROGRAM'

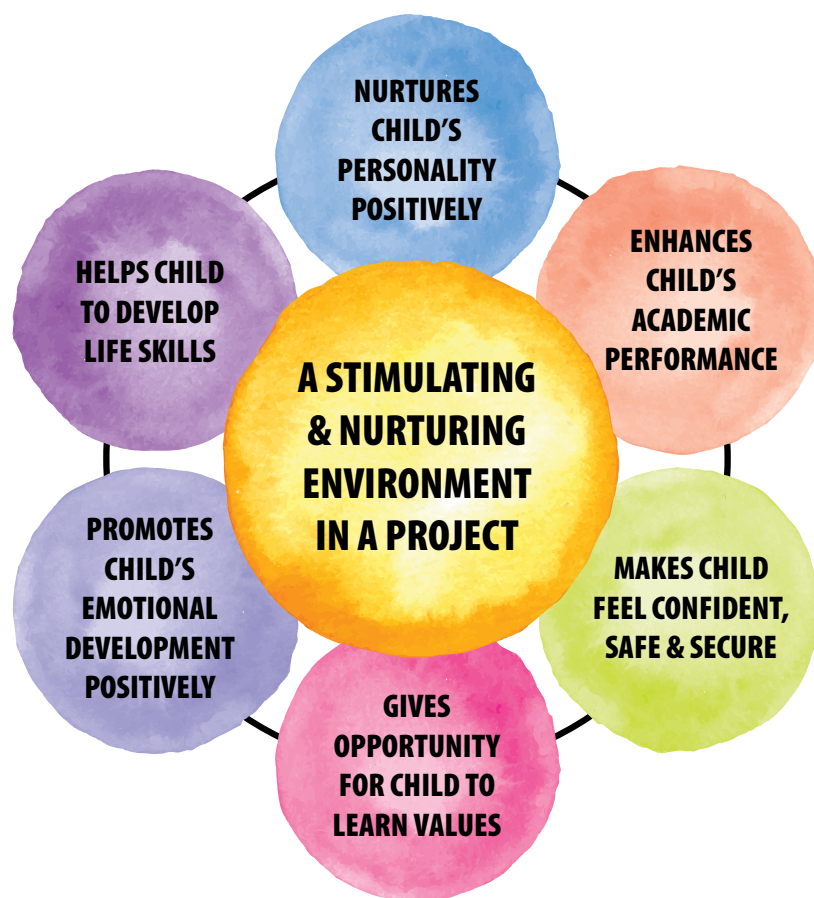
To have a perpetual impact on children's growth, development, and improved well-being, the Light to Life Program has adopted a holistic and integrated approach. The core concept of the Light to Life Program is to adopt a 'Holistic child development' approach for nurturing the growth and development of the children under care. It means the child is seen as a whole person, and all the aspects of that child's physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual development are addressed. The support extended to a child should not be limited to physical or mental health needs but goes beyond acquiring knowledge. It includes emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. To be precise, the holistic child development approach aims to nurture and develop the 'whole child' in a comprehensive manner.

A project working for children cannot focus merely on education to enhance their academic

performance by repeating the contents of textbooks to learn, pass exams, and succeed academically, nor on their physical growth by stating that children are fed daily, but it goes beyond this. The focus should be on adopting a comprehensive approach towards a child's development in all spheres of life.

If the program focuses only on one or two aspects of a child's development, the child will not grow into a wholesome person. The mind, body, and spirit must be addressed together. For example, without social development, isolation can lead to emotional detachment. Similarly, emotional disturbances can lead to aggression, hyperactivity, anxiety or depression. Likewise, without spiritual development, children would not learn to pay respect, be responsible and show reverence for themselves and others. Hence, holistic development in all spheres of their lives has to occur.





The Light to Life Program does not advocate organizing only tutoring the children to improve their academic outcomes or providing daily nutritious food, as these limited interventions do not make their lives wholesome. The concept also has to consider their socio-emotional, cognitive, and spiritual development if their lives are to be fully transformed. Only then can the children acquire essential life skills like resilience, socialization, and coping with challenging situations.

When children are holistically developed through aptly designed interventions, they can acquire various skills, excel in multiple areas, and stand out. Acquiring various life skills profoundly impacts their quality of life and empowers them to lead more fulfilling and independent lives. When the approach is comprehensive and wholesome and includes all aspects of a child's development, the process of achieving them is well set out; it would

certainly, enable the child to acquire the needed skills in life. Therefore, the Light to Life Program concept advocates that the projects provide these opportunities for children to transform their lives completely.

If the children under care are to be enabled to acquire academic and non-academic skills, the projects can facilitate the process only if, firstly, well-designed program interventions are well executed, and secondly, the projects are adequately equipped with facilities creating a conducive atmosphere for the children to learn. A well-planned, result-oriented program activities would help children in every aspect of their education and development and guide their growth.

Therefore, the prerequisite for any project that adopts a holistic child development approach is to ensure adequate space for the children in a

project with a positive environment to learn, grow and develop. It is essential to create a stimulating and enriching environment for the children to nurture their analytical and creative abilities. Otherwise, the program that has embraced the holistic child development concept would become meaningless. A conducive environment created by the project that provides appropriate infrastructural facilities equipped with learning and teaching aids can only enable children to think creatively, acquire skills, build emotional resilience, and face challenges in life.

Further, it would enable them to develop their minds, improve their abilities and acquire skills in academic and non-academic aspects. It would also enhance their confidence, improve social integration and broaden opportunities for meaningful social engagement. Only then can the children be empowered with the confidence needed for effective social interaction and personal growth and to thrive academically, socially, and personally. Therefore, it is paramount that unless the environment offered by the project is stimulative and enriched in all respects with care and love, the children cannot be equipped with crucial life skills for personal and professional growth.

Children from poor socio-economic backgrounds often lack access to an environment that enables them to focus on their academic education. Certain obstacles in their home environment do prevent them from learning. They may struggle with a particular subject or language and feel discouraged and overwhelmed, leading to a lack of motivation and decreased academic performance. The illiteracy of parents hinders them from getting any help to clarify their doubts or to get guidance from them. Therefore, to overcome the learning difficulties they experience at home, they must have a dedicated space in a project to get enough learning support to succeed academically. They need individual attention from a qualified teacher at the project who can identify and clarify their specific needs. They should help them overcome their learning obstacles individually and maximize

their potential by adopting remedial teaching measures. Remedial teaching involves the best techniques, such as offering step-by-step guidance, repeating the textbooks' contents, clarifying doubts, and guiding the children to complete their homework.

The children from the villages and urban slums lack quality education, nutritional support, health care, and clothing. Due to social disparity and economic backwardness, they cannot access such privileges. Hence, the best option is to encourage them to come to the projects every day after school hours, except on holidays, where a friendly atmosphere is created and remedial teachings are offered to increase their learning outcome. Also, they are induced to actively participate in various academic and extracurricular activities such as games, sports, arts & crafts work, dancing, and public speaking for their development. Due to the poor quality of education imparted in Government schools, children need special coaching in the subjects in which they are weak, especially in English, Mathematics, and Science. The project also has to provide nutritional support and health care to nurture them physically and provide them with learning materials like notebooks, school bags, uniforms, shoes, etc., to help them improve their academic performance. The projects should have adequate teaching materials and other basic facilities.

To complement what is being done for the children in the projects within the four walls, special training camps during summer holidays are to be organized to help them develop leadership qualities and personalities.

To summarize, the approach seeks to enable children to access quality education inclusively and comprehensively. It promotes family involvement and timely and adequate care and love while they are under their care. Specifically, the LTL program is meant to supplement and complement what the school cannot in transforming the lives of the children.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

A child's learning does not occur exclusively in a school or any institution or a project that works for the children's education. The home (family) and the village (community) are also places of learning for a child. A child's educational journey extends from the classroom to home and the community. When a project is primarily engaged in education, it also occupies an important place in the child's educational journey. Neither of these units can function alone without influencing the other. When learning takes place in all these places, it brings an enriching, continuous, and holistic learning experience for the child. Unless the family and the community are fully and actively involved in the children's learning process, a project promoting education in a village or a slum cannot fulfill its objectives. It cannot and should not function in isolation without building close relationships with the parents and community and actively engaging

them in the project's affairs. Children grow up to become members of the same community, so the responsibility for ensuring family and community involvement lies with the project. Because the family and the community are the ones who contribute greatly to children's upbringing, socializing and enabling them to relate to others and nature.

When the community and family participate in the children's learning process, they fully understand the importance of the project playing a positive role in the children's lives and, in return, contribute to the betterment of the project. It has been proved that parental involvement and the community's wider participation significantly influence children's education and greatly enhance their educational achievement and overall development. The project must establish closer relationships between the



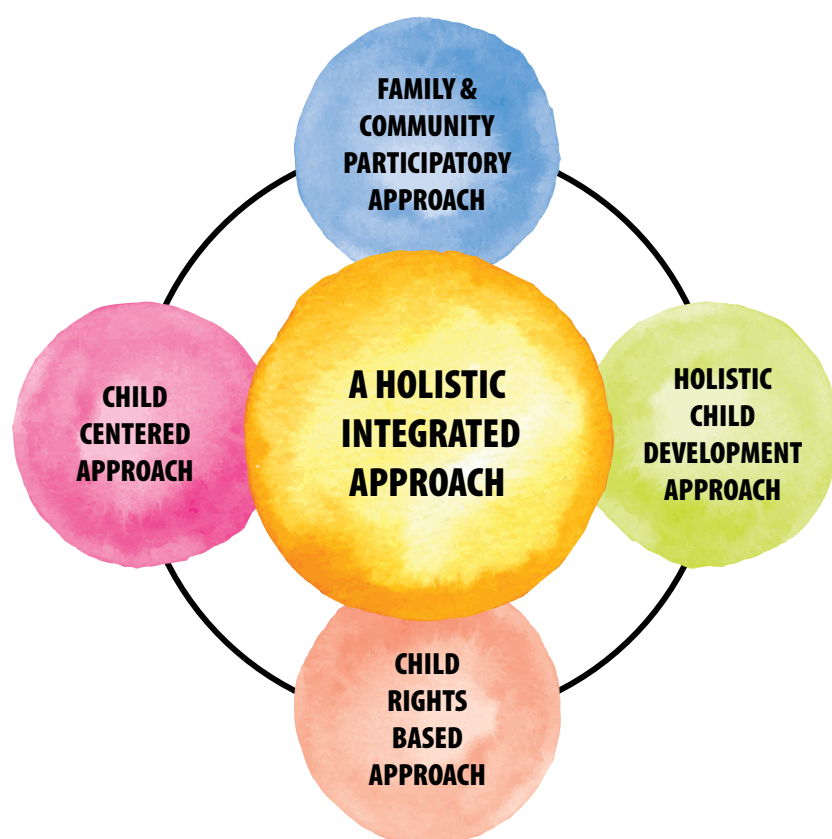
school, family and the community to maximize their contributions to the children's education. The project should know what is happening in a child's life outside the project that may positively or negatively impact his or her success and well-being. This can happen only when the project fosters a good relationship with the community and gains its confidence. The family and the community may not understand and appreciate the efforts being made by the project to transform the child's life if the family and the community do not feel a sense of ownership. When the project builds a healthy relationship through a formidable family-community partnership, the community will come forward to support it whenever it faces external challenges. As such, it is the responsibility of the project to ensure that all four units -family, community, school, and the project collaborate, work together, and strive to improve their partnership. Only then can children's education occur most effectively and efficiently.

The Light to Life Program, therefore, strongly promotes the family and community's active participation and involvement in the functioning

of the project. The concept does not approve of passive participation, wherein the family and community become mere spectators. The concept advocates for active participation, which means the family and the community are encouraged to take part in the project's decision-making process. Secondly, community involvement is different from community participation. It means the community takes control of certain activities of the project that make them feel they own the project and voluntarily come forward to contribute in whatever form they can for the project's betterment.

Further, the project must work for community empowerment to address social, economic, and political issues. Community empowerment is more than the community's participation, involvement, or engagement. It is about community ownership of the program and action. The mere involvement of the parents in the children's educational advancement or the community's participation in certain affairs of the project would not make the project successful unless it includes community empowerment as one of its objectives and works towards it. The program concept does not restrict





the participation of parents or the community merely in the case of children's education; it promotes community participation and community awareness, which would lead to community empowerment. When the community members are empowered socially and politically, they come together, understand their strengths, discuss the problems and issues that affect their lives and address them collectively.

Raising awareness to address social issues, especially those affecting women and children, is crucial. Children are likely to be affected by factors such as conflict among the parents, gender-based violence, child abuse, parents' addiction to alcohol, neglect and so on. When children grow up in such a situation, they can experience depression, anxiety, guilt, anger issues and an inability to trust others, leading to behavioural and academic problems. If a project does not address the social issues of the parents and the community, all its efforts to bring change in the lives of children will go in vain.

Besides, the project has to give the utmost importance to upholding children's rights. The world has acknowledged that children have the same human rights as adults and specific rights in recognizing their unique needs and interests. The UN Convention on the Rights of Children has set out those rights, and every organization that works for children must recognize the fundamental human dignity of all children and work towards realizing the same. Therefore, the concept also included the child rights-based approach as an essential aspect of the child development program.

The child rights-based approach envisages treating children with dignity and respect and upholding their rights and interests. Children

are recognized as actors, not merely passive recipients of adult care and protection. In particular, the project must accord the right to participation as the highest priority because it makes children realize other rights, influences outcomes, achieves justice and protects them from abuse. Children's active participation in deciding matters that affect their lives are essential to their development. It strengthens their independence, resilience and social competence. If they are encouraged to express their views, they will be less vulnerable to abuse and better able to contribute towards their protection. There is also ample evidence that when children are given a chance to participate, they gain skills, confidence, and maturity to express their views and influence decisions. The deeper the level of participation, the more the children can influence what happens to them and the greater the opportunities for personal development. Therefore, the child rights-based approach is also undoubtedly a part of the Light to Life Program concept.

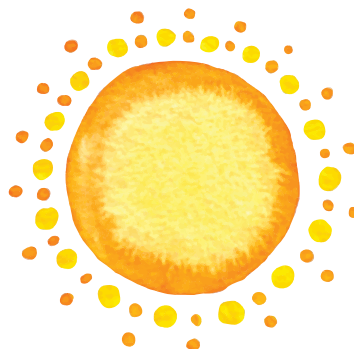
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Light to Life Program embodies a holistic and integrated approach that addresses every facet of a child's development. It not only nurtures academic and non-academic skills but also emphasizes the crucial role of family and community engagement in supporting children's education and overall well-being.

To transform this concept into a tangible impact, we must develop and distribute clear, actionable guidelines for program implementers and staff. These guidelines should detail specific interventions and outline the anticipated outcomes, ensuring

that every participant understands their role in this transformative journey.

Now is the time to act. Let us commit to making these guidelines a reality and to mobilizing our communities and resources in support of this vital initiative. Together, we can turn the vision of the Light to Life Program into a living, breathing force for positive change, paving the way for a brighter future for every child we reach. Join us in this mission, and let's illuminate the path to a thriving, empowered community.







children faced with sexual and physical harassment and children with low esteem and so on. In such a scenario, looking forward to the holistic growth of a child needs special care and attention. To this great attempt, Light to Life invites wholehearted support and cooperation from all its stakeholders starting from the Donor Agency [DA] to the Implementing Agency [IA], that includes the local Light to Life Units [LTLU], the facilitators, children, and the parents. To synchronize the activities and functionality of each unit of Light to Life, it is pertinent to have common guidelines and action plans duly realized by the concerned bodies. The common guidelines deal with the general purview of the setup of a child care centre, documentation, budgetary planning, correspondence, teaching methodologies, logistics of administration, fund utilization, programming and training.

INITIATING LIGHT TO LIFE UNIT

Survey

Identifying children from the less privileged community is the primary task of initiating a project. A basic survey should be kept gauging the socio-economic status of a community, specifically in connection with the educational and physical growth of the children of that community. Children's accessibility to their nearby learning centres, their mode of reaching school, their learning environment, the basic amenities provided for them at school, the Government support if any for food and uniforms, the efficiency of existing school learning facilities, their interest in regular school and study methods, and the number of drop-out students, etc., must be seriously assessed. Along with that, there is a need for a thorough mapping of the community's literacy rates, interest in the education of their children, livelihood, financial background, health concerns, hygiene, access to water and basic amenities, cleanliness, and community support to the child cause, etc.

Project Proposal Submission

After conducting the preliminary survey, the project initiating team can draft a proposal and children's list for submission. Children from classes 1 to 7 (Age probably 6 to 12) can be accommodated in that list, though Light to Life envisions supporting up to 12th grade students. Hence a child enrolled at the age of 12 can be at the center for a very minimum 5 years, which would be significant to build a behavior and to formulate a character in a child.

Documentation

Child List for submission must carry the details of the name, address, and photo of each child. There must be files separately maintained for each child to keep each one's application of joining, a copy

of the Adhaar, a copy of their birth certificate, a copy of the periodical health checkups, and the periodical progress report of their school education. Other timely documents that indicate the child's improvement can also be kept intact for assessing growth.

Documents & Registers to be maintained at each unit:

1. Children's Enrollment Register
2. Children's Attendance Register
3. Children's Leaving Register
4. Part Time Tutors/Facilitators Attendance Register
5. Program Activities Register
6. Child Profile File
7. Distribution Register
8. Parents Meeting Register
9. Stock Issue Register
10. House and School Visit Register
11. Movement Register
12. Financial Records

Those above-mentioned Registers must be maintained properly in each centre and should be readily available for any evaluation and monitoring either from the monitoring agency or from the implementing agency.

Location

It is imperative to find an ideal location where all enrolled students can assemble and can have classes without any fear or frustration and requires fair accessibility to the learning center either by walking or through vehicles. It must be a safe and secure place to conduct classes, to have parents

and teachers' meetings and to assemble freely to conduct and attend any seminars or cultural events programmed by the Centre. Ideally, non-religious and apolitical spaces are good. The government-funded public halls, auditoriums, or community centres are also fine if procured sanction for the same.

1. Each centre should have proper facilities for its enrolled children to workout their school education exercises.
2. The premises should be kept clean and hygienic, more particularly the food serving areas.
3. Clean water, clean utensils and neat washable areas are required. Moreover, any food items that are stored, must be kept in fresh and neat bottles and cans.
4. Each centre should have enough toilets and wash-room facilities according to the number of students.
5. Make sure to create a classroom ambiance for children where they are being advised to settle for classes.
6. The location of classes must be student-friendly. Avoid stick discipline, derogatory remarks and keep away from physical abuse.
7. The Centre must keep gender parity, and in no way treat children based on caste, class, color, creed, or religion.



Enrollment

The enrollment of the children required a formal application from the concerned parents, with a strong emphasis on their voluntary decision to send their children to the LTL centres. While joining, it is mandatory to collect and document a copy of the Aadhar of the child, a copy of their birth certificate, and a passport-size photo for identification purposes.

Local Administrator [LA]

Each LTL unit needs to have a Local Administrator, who will be appointed by the implementing agency [IA]. LA is responsible for initiating, implementing and monitoring the project activities on a timely basis at the local level on behalf of the IA. S/he shall be the head of the team appointed by the IA, hence responsible for overseeing fund utilization, proper accounting and meaningful actualization of the objectives and goals intended for the project.

Educational Supervisor [ES]

Each LTL project shall have an educational supervisor to coordinate the entire activities of the project. S/he must chalk out programs, draft budget and disseminate all activities of the project in consulting with the Local Administrator. S/he is responsible for maintaining the code and conducting the whole project. As the primary contact person, the ES must be the corresponding person to liaise between IA, LA and Educational facilitators. S/he must make sure that all files on the project students, account-related registers, if any, attendance register of both students and facilitators etc., should be kept intact. S/he should ensure the classes and other related seminars

or programs are to be held on proper time and appropriate place as per the schedule. A periodical report of the activities must be sent to the IA.

Social Worker/Counsellor

Among the Educational Facilitators, it is preferably good to have one serve work as a Social Worker or as a Counsellor. Their duty is primarily to visit the students' homes, understand grass root level penetration of the activity, equipping children as well as parents to withstand during times of crisis and challenges.

Educational Facilitators [EF]

Each centre's educational and community development activities are to be managed by its educational facilitators, whose selection will be done by the Implementing Agency in consultation with the Local Administrator and Educational Supervisor. The facilitator and student ratio must be 1:30. The methodology of teaching should not be the same as what the students receive in their own respective schools. Rather, the class session must focus on homework completion, doubt clearance, practice of question-and-answer, writing methods, coverage of subject-wise difficult portions, and remedial and career coaching etc., Apart from the above areas, the topics related to social harmony, tolerance, time management, stress management, scientific temper, value-based orientations etc., must also be included. EF should also conduct periodical house visit and provide feed backs to the ES.

Educational facilitators along with ES should go through and be updated with time-to-time training sessions arranged by its respective apex bodies.

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY: STUDENTS AND FACILITATORS

As a Right-Based humanitarian program, LTL is committed to bring positive changes in the quality of life of children by protecting and promoting their rights through all its programs. It is the responsibility of the LTL project to protect children from abuse or violence within or outside of our organization. Hence each centre should have

a thorough knowledge on the Child Protection Policy and a copy of the same duly signed by LA and EF persons, be kept in its custody, which is an inevitable prerequisite as per the Governmental norms. A complaint/grievance box should be kept in every centre to maintain the secrecy of the complainant.

LTL CENTRE AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The LTL centre aims for child focussed community development; Therefore, the integral development of the community is the central mandate. Each LTL centre should have special plans and programs for the community where the LTL unit is situated.

The parent- teacher- student tie ups should be promoted to extend development programs to the community. Socio-cultural and economic programs for the community have to be incorporated into the budgetary provisions of the project.



IMPLEMENTING AGENCY (IA)

For the smooth and effective execution of the Light to Life Program, there must be an Implementing Agency which must have a dedicated FCRA approval together with 12AA registration granted by Income Tax Department to manage foreign

funds. It must be a registered organization under the Society Act of Indian legal premise and must have the capacity to disseminate various activities of LTL in its full strength and vision. It must also be an agency that has proven its excellence.

FUND ALLOCATION AND AREAS OF PROGRAMMING

As far as LTL is concerned, there is a common framework for its activity planning. The whole program should facilitate four interconnected areas, such as educational, physical, socio-emotional, and value-based inculcation. Hence the funding should also be utilized proportionally to take care of each area. The general understanding has been made to utilize 35% for educational activities and another 30% for physical aspects of children. 10% of the funds can be set for socio-emotional and cognitive programs and 5% can be for value-based learning. The remaining 20% shall be used for program administrative expenses.

Budgeting

Proper budgeting must be done for the whole yearly activities of each LTL unit and should be approved before the last week of March every year. Though there is a general format for budgeting, it is necessary to allot funds for qualitative, unique and impact producing programs based on the context where the unit is located. The LA and ES are supposed to attend and internalize budgeting and finance related matters by attending training programs as arranged.

LOCAL SUPPORTIVE TEAM (LST)

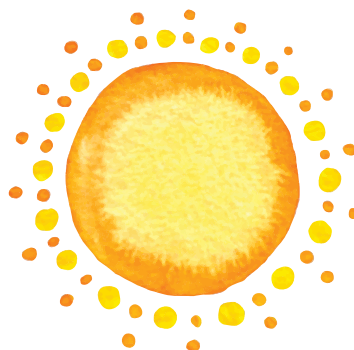
Each LTL project can have a Local Supportive Team consisting of Five members out of which one at least should be a woman. It is appropriate to select persons who are expert in the field of education, health, and child care, as members of LST. The team is to be guided by the Local Administrator. The purpose of LST is to bring

out positive suggestions for the right upbringing of the sponsored children of each unit, propose unique programs and help the LA to co-ordinate activities among children and the community. This team can raise local funds for any other expenses that occur beyond the regular funding of the implementing Agency.

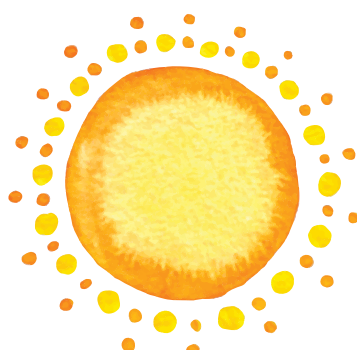
CONCLUSION

LTL programs aim to foster the overall development of both children and the community in underprivileged areas. The activities and action guidelines are designed to cultivate a well-educated, morally grounded younger generation and a self-reliant community in terms of production and distribution. The elements and concepts

incorporated into the action guidelines and the concept paper have been drafted in consultation with all stakeholders considering current socio-economic background of India. Therefore, appropriate changes can be suggested and implemented by the sponsoring body, monitoring agency, and implementing agency as needed.







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For and on behalf of Light to Life Program, this document has been prepared and produced by Holistic Child Development India.