“All children should be able to achieve the greatest possible realisation of their innate potential”
–Oscar van Leer
Who we are

A good start puts each individual child on the path to realising their full potential, and sets the foundation for a healthy, fair and peaceful society.

Founded in 1949, the Bernard van Leer Foundation focused in 1965 on working worldwide to ensure that babies, toddlers and the people who care for them have a good start in life. Our mission is to improve opportunities for all young children, especially the millions of young children growing up in circumstances of social, economic and environmental disadvantage around the world.

After five decades of investing in early childhood development, we believe the major challenge is the transition to scale. By working together with governments, civil society, philanthropy, academia, international organisations and business, we find the best programmes and policies to improve children’s lives. We partner with them by providing funding, expertise, networks and support to scale these up for maximum impact.
Brain building

1 million synapses are created in a baby’s brain every second.¹

250 million children under 5 – across almost every country in the world – do not receive the care they need to reach their full potential.²

US$6.40–17.60: estimated return for every $1 spent on high-quality early years programmes.³

Sources

1 https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-science-of-ecd
2 www.thelancet.com/series/ECD2016
3 www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(11)60889-1/fulltext?code=lancet-site
The early years of life – from before birth to five years old – is a unique window of opportunity to improve lives.

Babies’ and toddlers’ brains develop rapidly, and small changes at this young age can have lifelong effects. Young children need plenty of love and attentive care from caregivers – in healthy environments – as well as opportunities for proper healthcare, nutrition, protection from harm and play.

Research has increasingly shown that investing in babies’ and toddlers’ development translates into better health, greater ability to learn and work with others, and higher incomes in adulthood.
A good start for all children

We work to spread innovative ideas, impactful programmes and the most effective policies worldwide through:

- **Strategic funding for scale**
  We are much more than a funding organisation, but providing the right money at the right time to the right projects and people is a crucial part of our work.

- **An international network of peers**
  We bring together diverse committed leaders to drive impactful policies and programmes around the world.

- **Global knowledge and expertise**
  We create, curate and share relevant knowledge that informs and inspires change in the lives of babies, toddlers and the people that care for them.

- **Advocacy**
  We work with organisations worldwide to call for better policies, services and designs for young children and caregivers.
Our investment areas

We bring together robust science, practical ideas and effective partners and leaders to improve the lives of babies, toddlers and caregivers.
Parents+

The most powerful influences on a young child’s life are their parents and caregivers. Parents+ combines early-years coaching for those caregivers with at least one service that meets families’ basic needs (for example, health, nutrition, childcare or finance). “Bundling” services in this way has made both the coaching and the service more effective, and has proved to be a cost-effective way to achieve impact at scale in the early years.

Urban95

Urban95 is a global initiative that supports the healthy development of young children growing up in cities. We work together with city leaders, planners, designers, advocates, communities to bring a child-lens to every layer of city decision-making to improve access to quality services, sustainable mobility and vibrant public places.

We are driven by a simple question:

*If you could experience the city from 95cm – the height of a 3-year-old – what would you change?*

Early Years Thought Leadership

From sharing the latest research to promoting inspirational ideas on how to scale up initiatives, Early Years Thought Leadership shines a light on how to make change happen. In bringing people together, the initiative also builds a network of champions that advocate and take action for the needs of young children and their families across different regions, fields and levels of decision making.
We work with our partners to bring about change at scale.

Through our partnerships, we create, replicate and scale-up programmes that can change lives.

**Portfolio countries**
We work in Brazil, Israel, India, Jordan and the Netherlands – where we develop long-term partnerships. Our on-the-ground teams work closely with local and national government and administrators, civil society, NGOs, communities and others to refine the most promising early years innovations.

**Learning partnerships**
We provide technical and financial support to strategic partners outside our portfolio countries to expand and impact our learnings in robust ECD policy and programs beyond our core countries. By learning and sharing knowledge across borders and disciplines, we can truly grow the impact of our work and reach many more children globally.

**Global scanning**
With the help of our partners and networks, we track relevant innovations around the world and ensure these are reflected in our work.

**Learning and documenting our impact**
It’s essential to understand what works, where, and why. We monitor our interventions, evaluate our impact and document practices that have powerful learnings on sustainable change at scale.
A good start for all children

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