

History

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation located in The Hague (Netherlands) that was founded in 1949 by Bernard van Leer a Dutch entrepreneur who built a large multinational packaging company. After witnessing the destruction of World War II, Bernard van Leer was inspired to invest in improving society and started the Foundation in 1949 with a wide range of philanthropic activities. After Bernard passed away in 1958, his son Oscar took over the packaging company and the Foundation. In the mid 1960s Oscar van Leer decided to focus the Foundation on of young children. Since then the Foundation has focused on developing and sharing knowledge about what works in early childhood development. It provides financial support and expertise to partners in government, civil society and business to help test and scale effective services for young children and families.

Vision and Mission

Over the last 50 years, the Foundation has invested more than half a billion dollars and worked in all regions of the world. Its partnerships have informed public policies in more than 25 countries, led to innovations in service delivery and training that have been widely adopted by governments and non-profit organisations, and generated breakthrough ideas that have changed the way stakeholders from parents to policymakers think about the earliest years of a child's life.

In 2016 after five decades of investing in early childhood development, the Bernard van Leer Foundation has entered a new phase where it believes the major challenge is the transition to scale. Plenty of ideas to improve the youngest children's health, nutrition, protection and learning have proven their worth in small-scale projects – but the question is how to effectively reach hundreds of thousands or millions of children? To answer this question the Foundation is building partnerships in three areas:

- Parents+: combining coaching for parents in early childhood development with services that meet families' basic needs;
- Urban95: incorporating a focus on early childhood development into the planning and management of cities;
- Building Blocks: promoting the science of nurturing care and sharing best practices in transitioning successful early childhood programmes to scale.

Income and Geographical investment

The Foundation's income of about 19 million euro is derived from an endowment established and managed by the Van Leer Group Foundation after the Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer were sold in 1999.

Geographically, the Foundation is investing in a set of core countries: Brazil, India, Israel, Côte d'Ivoire, the Netherlands, Peru and Turkey. In addition, it is launching a regional initiative to support refugee families, and plans to establish a small number of partnerships outside of these core geographies, where it sees opportunities to learn, to share knowledge and to have a transformative impact at scale.

Team and Board of Trustees

The Foundation operates through an international team of 39 people based in its Headquarters in The Hague and through team members located in the core countries.

The fiduciary responsibility for fulfilling the vision and mission of the Foundation, as laid down in the Articles of Association, resides with the Board of Trustees composed of 8 members. The Board appoints its own members, who serve a maximum of three 4-year terms. The members of the Board are also on the Board of the Van Leer Group Foundation. The Board's oversight role includes appointing the Executive Director, evaluating his performance, and approving the strategic plans and the annual financial and operational plans. The Board meets at least four times per year.