

Freedom Kit Bags

*eco-friendly, sustainable, hygienic
sanitary wear*

Trustees Annual Report to 30 June 2021

Freedom Kit Bags (FKBs) is a registered UK charity (1173656). The Freedom Kit Bag project began in late 2016 and it was quickly obvious it had great potential so the trustees decided to manage it through a charity, established in June 2017.

The main aim of the charity is to provide eco-friendly, hygienic, reusable sanitary wear to the women and girls of Nepal, alongside health and hygiene education so the wider community, including men and boys, understand menstruation, its role in reproduction and how everyone can stay healthy.

Over 80% of the population of Nepal live in the countryside and many are below-subsistence farmers and are very poor. Disposable sanitary wear is considerably more expensive than in the UK, besides which there is nowhere to dispose of used pads. Consequently, most women use old rags leading to years of persistent infections, interrupted education for younger girls, loss of dignity, exclusion and lost opportunities. In some communities there are still widespread beliefs that women are unclean.

Freedom Kit Bags provides a solution.

Trustees and Structure

The current trustees, who served during the year, are:

Dr Rosa M Matheson

Dr Ian Matheson

Mr Brian Mildenhall

Mrs Anne Fisher

Mrs Hanna-Gael Darney

The governing document is a deed of trust and the charity is unincorporated. None of the trustees receive a salary or personal benefit from the charity. The trustees meet regularly and are in constant discussion to raise funds, develop and manage the programme. Three of the trustees visit Nepal twice a year (about 10 weeks each person) enabling us a first-hand review and management of the programme. The trustees personally pay around one half of the costs of these visits.

Due to Covid restrictions no visits have been possible since our last visit in November 2019. Our next visit is planned for March 2022.

The trustees have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and have taken this into account when carrying out their work. Likewise, risks are identified and mitigated. One of the key risks is to ensure our funds are well spent and fully accounted for and our regular visits to Nepal and working through trusted individuals known to us for many years helps to ensure this.

We have four Nepalese 'ambassadors' based in Nepal who help in many ways, such as – dissemination of information, profile raising, facilitating payments, distributing the Kit Bags, documenting recipients of the Kit Bags, delivering education and empowerment talks and workshops, and the follow up of recipients to gain feedback.

The trustees have significant experience of supporting work in Nepal. They have a good network of contacts engaged in health and education fields of work in the UK and in Nepal.

Review of activities

A Freedom Kit Bag provides everything a woman needs to manage her periods and stay healthy for up to 36 months. The materials are bought in Nepal and the Kit Bags are made locally in Nepal bringing employment to those who need it most. Just as important, our Education Programme (for sexual health and personal hygiene) is often the first time a community has heard the facts about menstruation. This is helping to break down barriers and taboos; bringing greater respect and equality of opportunity for women and girls.

Covid-19 has had a big impact on our work. Nepal has instigated a number of lockdowns making travel and local village meetings difficult, if not impossible at times. We remain acutely aware of our responsibilities to protect our 'ambassadors' and to encourage social distancing in villages where many will not be vaccinated.

The trustees have not been able to visit Nepal since Nov 2019. Like so many, we have discovered "zoom" and internet communications and have had almost daily contact with our 'ambassadors' throughout. When circumstances allowed we have been able to distribute our Kit Bags and the pace of distributions has picked up markedly in the last twelve months. The ever increasing demand can be seen from the following figures for Kit Bags distributed by financial year:

- to 30 June 2017, **729**
- to 30 June 2018, **2089**
- to 30 June 2019, **2132**
- to 30 June 2020, **1917**
- to 30 June 2021, **2599**
- six months to end 2021, **2678**

Making the total over 12,000 Freedom Kit Bags made in Nepal, distributed in Nepal, by Nepalese. And every one of these has been accompanied by a full education programme.

It is sobering to dwell on these figures for a moment. A Kit Bag will last at least three years. During that time a woman will have 39 periods, typically lasting 4.5 days each. Before a woman would use old rags or nothing. These women will have more than 470,000 periods, lasting over 2,100,000 days – now in comfort and with dignity.

During her period a woman should change five times a day, on average. Before she didn't because she didn't know – and suffered poor health as a result. Our education has taught her that. So, our Kit Bags to date will give more than 10,000,000 changes of pad.

The cost per “use” of a £25 Kit Bag is just 2.85p. Remarkable value.

These figures are important for another reason. The Nepal Government has a programme to give some (but not all) schoolgirls some (but not enough) disposable pads. The retail cost of a disposable pad in Nepal varies from 9p to 25p, much more expensive than a Freedom Kit Bag. The real problem, though, is Nepal does not have the resources to dispose of used pads; they are thrown in bushes, block rudimentary toilets, or add to pollution by burning.

What's more, it risks developing a habit that rural women cannot sustain. Economically, the typical Nepalese is about 11 times poorer¹ than the average UK resident (¹ GDP per capita Purchasing Power Parity). In other words, it's like asking a woman in the UK to pay between 99p and £2.75 for one disposable pad; currently she can buy one for about 8p. The trustees make this point at every opportunity to Nepalese Education and Local Government Officers.

In the summer of 2020 we carried out telephone based research with 100 women who had one of our Kit Bags. We asked each 117 questions to get an extensive understanding of their views, use and care for the Kit Bags. Amongst other things, this told us that 99% were happy with their Kit Bags and 98% said it was better than what they had used before.

Our four “Sewing Rooms” in different village locations (where we are training local women to make the Kit Bags) were making steady progress. Covid-19 has been a set back because the women could not meet and the financial pressures meant some had to take what labouring jobs they could or move to larger towns.

However, we are confident that three of the Sewing Rooms will get back on their feet and we will progress this on our next visit in March 2022. We have also set up two new Sewing Rooms with two well established Nepalese women's groups in Butwal and Sangfebagar. We have trained them to make the Kit Bags and to manage and deliver the Education Programme. So far, more than 1,000 Kit Bags have been made and distributed by these two women's groups.

Additionally, we have set up a Sewing Room in Kathmandu and this, too, has already produced more than 1,000 Kit bags.

Often we are invited to support other community programmes. The local Police asked us to give Kit Bags to women on remand and to attend rural programmes addressing mental health, where we were able to give Kit Bags. We have joined flood relief programmes and given Kit Bags to hundreds of displaced women. We have been to “safe houses” for women fleeing domestic violence. Many of these stories and the full range of our work is reported in our Annual Newsletter 2021 available from the trustees.

Funds

The charity's reserves at 30 June 2021 are higher than the trustees intend due to the delaying effects of Covid-19. The trustees normally intend to hold a reserve to enable production and distribution to continue for at least nine months in the event of a significant short term drop in income.

As at the end of 2021 reserves have reduced by around £15,000 reflecting the significant pick up since the summer as Covid concerns abate. With our existing and new Sewing Rooms we are able to maintain a high level of production and distribution, and our reserves should continue to fall over coming months.

Our need for financial support is now greater than ever. We are, of course, immensely grateful for the fantastic support we have received from many different organisations and individuals. On behalf of the thousands who have benefitted, we say "dhanyabad".

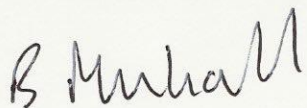
As well as the costs of materials and manufacture, other costs include training and education, and follow up. Our Nepalese ambassadors are paid a small amount in keeping with local rates for this work.

Transport is a high cost. Many of the locations take a whole day or more to reach often over rough tracks. Where it is feasible we use local buses but often we must hire a jeep capable of these tough journeys.

The debt identified in the Accounts has now been fully repaid.

All our funds are from donations achieved through the efforts of the un-paid trustees and volunteers. A further two individuals are paid to identify and help contact grant giving foundations and trusts across the UK.

Signed on behalf of the trustees:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Mildenhall', written in a cursive style.

Mr Brian Mildenhall

Accounts

For the period 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021

	2020/21	£	2019/20	£
Receipts				
Grants and donations		90,289		80,606
Payments				
Charitable activities		53,598		33,425
Cost of Fundraising		22,784		16,232
Other expenses		584		1446
Total cost		76,966		51,102
Surplus/(Deficit)		13,323		29,505
Cash and bank at 1 July 2020		71,061		42,768
Debtors		5,012		
Total reserves		89,396		72,273
Represented by				
Cash and bank at 30 June 2021		85,269		
Debtors		4,127		
Total		89,396		

Notes to the Accounts:

None of the trustees received a remuneration or personal benefit from the charity

The charity has no UK employees

The debtor amount shown in the accounts has been cleared in the 2021/22 year

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT

I report on the financial statement of Freedom Kit Bags for the year ended 30th June 2021.

Respective responsibilities

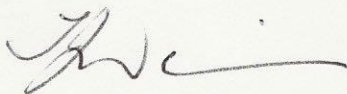
The charity is responsible for the preparation of the financial statements, and considers that the audit requirement of Section 43 (2) of the Charities Act 1993 (the Act) does not apply. It is my responsibility to state, on the basis of procedures specified in the General Directions given by the Charity Commissioners under Section 43 (7) (b) of the Act, whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of the Independent Examiner's Report

My examination was carried out in accordance with the General Directions of the Charity Commissioners. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the financial statements, and seeking any explanations concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit, and consequently I do not express an audit opinion on the view given by the financial statements.

Independent Examiner's statement.

In connection with my examination of the charity funds, nothing came to my attention which gave me cause to believe otherwise than that the financial statements accord with the accounting records of the charity, and that those records satisfied the requirements of the Act. I am not aware of any matter to which attention should be drawn in order to enable proper understanding of the financial statements to be reached.



Independent Examiner

07 February 2022

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