

Freedom Kit Bags

*eco-friendly, sustainable, hygienic
sanitary wear*

Trustees Annual Report to 30 June 2022

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. We talk weekly with our ambassadors in Nepal via the internet.

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 were possible in 2020 and 2021. We were in Nepal for six weeks in March 2022 and will visit again in October 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, essential to the programme. Their role includes – identifying community groups in need, planning distributions with local representatives, maintaining quality control, delivering education and empowerment talks, distributing kit bags, maintaining detailed accounts, raising our profile, providing information, keeping detailed records of recipients of our kit bags, and carrying out follow up interviews to gain feedback from users. The cost of this work is about £500 a month.

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 36 months. The cost of a freedom Kit bag is just £25.

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 had a big impact on our work. Nepal instigated a number of lockdowns making travel and local village meetings difficult, if not impossible at times. During the early months of 2021 the local situation began to improve and we were able to resume distributions at a significant rate.

The ever increasing demand can be seen in the 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**
- to 30 June 2022, **5347**

Making the total almost 15,000 Freedom Kit Bags made in Nepal, distributed in Nepal, mostly by Nepalese women. 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 an average of 4.5 days each. Before a woman would use old rags or nothing. These women will have 585,000 periods, lasting over **2,632,500** 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 13,000,000 changes of pad.

The cost per change of pad 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 (remote locations incur higher costs), much more expensive than a Freedom Kit Bag. Even so, 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 12 times poorer¹ than the average UK resident (¹ GDP per capita Purchasing Power Parity, IMF estimates). In other words, it's like asking a woman in the UK to pay between £1.08 and £3 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. We will repeat this feedback exercise in the near future.

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 was a set back as the women could not meet and the financial pressures meant some had to take what labouring jobs they could or move to larger towns. As a consequence we have closed one Sewing Room.

The three remaining Sewing Rooms are beginning to get back on their feet and production has started strongly in one and tentatively in two. A "new fourth" Sewing Room set up in Kathmandu in March 2021 has already produced 1,330 Kit Bags.

Our relationship with two well established Nepalese women's groups in Butwal and Sangfebagar has developed quickly since early 2021. Both groups are very energetic and active in their local areas, engaging with local decision-makers and raising our profile. We trained them to make the Kit Bags and to manage and deliver the Education Programme. So far, more than 2,000 Kit Bags have been made and distributed by these two women's groups.

All other Kit Bags are made by a small family business in Kathmandu.

We continue to support other communities, such as working with local Police to give Kit Bags to women on remand. We have joined flood relief programmes to give Kit Bags to displaced women. We go to "safe houses" for women and girls fleeing domestic violence and sexual abuse. Our work is reported in our Annual Newsletter available from the trustees.

To give a sense of the impact, here's an extract from a report by one of our Nepali ambassadors:

"Maya (not her real name) is about 35 years old, her story left us with tears. She is a working woman with two kids. She works as a labourer, daily basis. Sometimes she finds work and sometime not. Her family have been struggling she said.

In this situation, management of menstruation is challenging for her, but she never seriously thought about it. She has added about using single pad for 3 days for many times, and also using unwashed clothes. She did not know about the menstruation hygiene and sanitation.

She added more, that from the childhood till now nobody has told her about this thing. Being born in the poor family deprived her from the school as well. That is why, she assumed not knowing anything like this. She already has been through reproductive health condition. For which she has been visiting government hospital. But even in there nobody told her about harmful practice. The hospital just issued some medication.

Her situation seems painful to us, after the program we have provided counselling regarding her health and other situation. She has said, 'I always been happy whatever the situation I came through and always wear smile in my face. Today my heart melted and tears rolled down and my eyes conveyed my cry to others, but my soul felt real happiness sharing my situation with all and having my first ever gift, a Freedom Kit Bag.'

Funds

The charity's reserves at 30 June 2022 reduced markedly. 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.

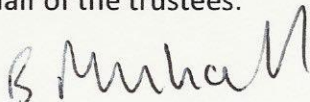
Over the past few months we have seen a large fall in income possibly due to world events and increasing financial concerns here in the UK. Our reserves are expected to fall considerably in the next six to nine months.

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".

We now have a proven track record of delivering a quality sustainable solution, remarkable value for money, education and community understanding, and above all – we are changing lives, improving equality and health for thousands.

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:

 1/9/22

Mr Brian Mildenhall

Accounts

For the period 1 July 2021 – 30 June 2022

	2021/22	£	2020/21	£
Receipts				
Grants and donations		76,322		90,289
Payments				
Charitable activities		80,123		53,598
Cost of Fundraising		9,345		22,784
Other expenses		860		584
Total cost		90,327		76,966
Surplus/(Deficit)		(14,005)		13,323
Cash and bank at 1 July 2020		85,269		
Debtors (1 July 2020)		4,127		
Total reserves		75,392		
Represented by				
Cash and bank at 30 June 2022		75,379		
Debtors (1 July 2022)		12		
Total		75,392		

Notes to the Accounts:

None of the trustees received a remuneration or personal benefit from the charity
The charity has no UK employees

**Report to the trustees/
members of**

Freedom Kit Bags

**On accounts for the year
ended**30th June 2022**Charity no
(if any)**

1173656

Set out on pages

Financial statement attached

**Responsibilities and
basis of report**

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above charity ("the Trust") for the year ended 30/06/2022.

As the charity's trustees, you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Charities Act 2011 ("the Act").

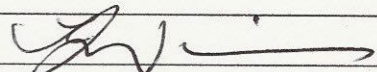
I report in respect of my examination of the Trust's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed all the applicable Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Act.

**Independent
examiner's statement**

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination which gives me cause to believe that in, any material respect:

- the accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act; or
- the accounts did not accord with the accounting records; or
- the accounts did not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair' view which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed:**Date:**

17/8/22

Name:

Terry John Williams

**Relevant professional
qualification(s) or body
(if any):**

Retired accountant

Address:

36 Bydemill Gardens, Highworth, Swindon, SN6 7BS.