



Trustees Annual Report to 30 June 2025

Freedom Kit Bags (FKB) is a registered UK charity (1173656). The Freedom Kit Bag project began in late 2016 and 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.

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 each year enabling us a first-hand review and management of the programme. The trustees personally pay a large contribution to the costs of these visits. Our last visit was in April 2025 and we will visit again in October 2026.

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.

The trustees have significant experience of supporting work in Nepal gained over the past 17 years. They have a wide network of contacts engaged in health and education both in the UK and in Nepal.

We have two 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.

Three of our sewing rooms are partnerships with three local Nepali organisations who have many years experience working in social development. They run many complimentary programmes around gender equality and social inclusion. Between them they have many contacts at local government level and are strong advocates of Freedom Kit Bags in their locality. In their own areas they carry out all the tasks ascribed to our ambassadors.

The need is great

Nepal is a very poor country. Adjusted for local prices and population, it is 17 times poorer than the UK. Over 80% of the population are mostly subsistence farmers. It's estimated that every second family has a member working abroad, usually in construction, warehousing or domestic work; around 25% of the national income comes from such remittances.

Women who are now in their 30s and 40s would have left school in their early teenage years. This was driven by poverty as parents could not afford school fees; the needs of the family for children to work in the home and the fields, collecting firewood or vegetation to feed their goats; the high rate of child marriage and the prevailing view that women did not need much education. Sadly, many of these factors still exist today.

Village primary schools have few resources other than some shared textbooks. At age 11 children move to secondary school, which for most means a walk of up to two hours to get to school and the same to return home.

Secondary schools are very basic by our standards. Often boys and girls use toilets of simple construction with no hooks or shelves to allow girls to change during their periods. As a result many miss school each month, fall behind in their studies and eventually drop out of education.

The upshot is a population with scant knowledge and understanding of the facts of menstruation and how to manage monthly periods in a hygienic and healthy way. Various myths and taboos feed into this knowledge-gap. In too many communities menstruating women are "untouchables" not allowed to go to their temple, not allowed to touch food, not allowed to touch men. Some believe if they touch plants, the plant will die. Young women and girls who challenge these ideas are told by their mothers they are bringing sin and shame to the family.

And, although illegal, Chhaupadi still exists: where young girls from the time of their first period are locked in a hut separate from the family. Every month they must endure this. Lighter forms of this practice exist, but no less harmful and discriminatory.

Consequently, women will use old clothes to make sanitary pads. Often they will be polyester lacking in absorbency so extra bulk is needed making them very uncomfortable. The women do not know to change often or about proper washing and drying – old clothes are put away damp so bacteria proliferate. Women suffer years of infection, discomfort and a lack of dignity. Problems and issues are not discussed openly, solutions easily become a low priority.

The national government gives funds to local governments to provide disposable pads to school girls. And some INGOs provide disposable pads. These programmes have real unintended consequences.

Disposable pads are very expensive in Nepal. They can cost from 12p to 25p per item depending on the difficulty of reaching the village (a significant proportion are more than two hours from a proper road). Typical nominal income is something like 25 times less than for the typical UK person. Imagine the problems we would have if one disposable pad cost from £3 to over £6.

By giving free disposable pads to school girls the government is encouraging a habit the girls cannot afford. We have heard first-hand accounts of young women wearing a disposable pad a whole day until it is thoroughly soaked and falling apart – because they cannot afford to replace it.

There is no easy way to dispose of a disposable pad in Nepal. In small towns rubbish is collected and then dumped by the sides of rivers. In a village there is no rubbish collection so pads are thrown in the bushes, sometimes buried in shallow pits, sometimes incinerated. Animals have died from eating discarded used pads.

The national government's initiative results in erratic provision, some schools are excluded from the programme, and mostly poor quality pads are provided – girls have told us they do not like to use them. Apart from this there is ample evidence to show disposable pads are environmentally more damaging than alternatives.

Freedom Kit Bags – education and a solution

We explain the facts about menstruation and its role in reproduction. We discuss common issues like discomfort, aches and pains, and what constitutes 'normal' for each person. We talk about healthy diets and the benefits of less sugar, spice and home-made alcohol.

We teach the need to wash hands and how to use pads correctly. We discuss the need to change often, to wash themselves with clean water rather than strong soaps.

Education is a vital first step, but alone is not enough. We need the women to experience a better way so they are motivated to maintain good practice and teach others. Every woman or girl who attends the education (and sometimes grandfathers, husbands and sons) is given a Freedom Kit Bag containing everything she needs to manage her periods for three years. Finally, we show how they can hand sew replacement pads when needed, using our pads as the template.

Our 'kit bags' are made in Nepal in one of our six sewing rooms giving some income to the women who make them. There are 12 cotton-rich reusable pads plus six thinner liners so women can add more absorbency when needed. We give three panties and three padholders to keep the pad in place with a waterproof lining to prevent leakage.

We include a small dry bag for used pads when changing away from home. There is soap to remind women to wash their hands plus a line and pegs to remind them to dry thoroughly in the sun. There is an attractive carry-purse so women and girls can take spare clean pads with them. Everything is contained in a larger bag made from recycled saris. Everything is colourful and celebratory.

All feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Women, girls, fathers, medics, social workers, local officials, police, teachers all praise our work and have welcomed us to almost 500 village events.

Review of activities

During the financial year we made and distributed **7,042** kit bags - the most ever. By the end of the 2025 calendar year the total since we started is an amazing **34,000**. It's remarkable and uplifting to think that so many women and girls (and many men and boys) will have a proper understanding of menstruation and the means to stay healthy because of this programme.



Collectively, these women will have **1,326,000** periods during the initial three years. They will bleed for around **5,967,000** days, and because of Freedom Kit Bags, they can face each of those days with dignity and comfort.

What's more, they can "afford" to change their pads **29,000,000** times without worry of the cost, without disposing of the used pads, and without infections and rashes.

Each change of pad costs our donors just **2.3p**. Each period costs only **51p**. Remarkable value, especially as this includes priceless education.

We now have sewing rooms in Chautara, Melamchi, Kathmandu, Butwal, Sanfebagar, and Nepalgunj. The last three are partnerships with local charities in Nepal, which we have developed over many years. Increasingly these three are gaining support from local governments. This often makes local distributions much easier to organise with officials in attendance to see for themselves the impact and quality of our programmes. Some have also given financial support.

In Chautara our sewing room is based in one room in an empty house (other rooms are used to store grain and crops). The three women here started by making 30 kit bags a month. That has steadily increased and now they make 150 kit bags a month. They have taught themselves how to maintain the sewing machines. It is easy to miss the significance of the income they earn from this regular work - without it they would need to find labouring work in the fields to sustain their young families.

Our Kathmandu sewing room was born out of the Covid pandemic. Many people faced an abrupt end to their income as tourism stopped and the effects are still in evidence today. We set up our sewing room in a family home where three women make kit bags, fitting the work around the family schedule.

In Butwal our partner is actively engaged with 10 local Municipalities. Each has attended a distribution event and have met together to discuss a way forward. They are

constrained by national procurement guidelines but are beginning to see how these exclude locally made solutions and foster a dependence on imports and a cost that most families cannot afford.

In Butwal we have trained a few older students (age 18) to be 'peer educators' who have now reached nearly 3,000 students to give them a better understanding of menstruation and menstrual hygiene alongside sexual health and the power to say "no".

Our partner in Sanfebagar has initiated a Dignified Menstruation Campaign across all 10 local governments in Achham district, which has now expanded to the ward level. This has helped increase awareness, community ownership, and acceptance of menstrual health initiatives. Encouragingly, local governments are actively supporting this campaign and have begun allocating a budget for Freedom Kits Bag, demonstrating strong local commitment and enhancing the project's sustainability.

In April 2025 all our sewing rooms came together for a few days in Kathmandu. We shared our histories and challenges, listening to many powerful, heart-breaking accounts. We shared best practices and looked ahead to continuing success.

We attended nearly 100 education and distribution events during the year - to schools, women's groups, hospitals, health posts, and women's safe houses in many parts of Nepal.



Increasingly when we visit schools we also invite the mothers of the students. This allows them to learn together and continue open conversations at home. It's not always possible for mothers to come into school, if rice needs planting or crops must be harvested. Often our ambassador will then go to the fields to teach the women there or hold evening classes, so no one is excluded.



Our educational flash cards are now available digitally along with a Nepalese transcript of the educational content. We make these available to schools and midwives to help reinforce the correct messages and consistent education..



Every place we visit we see the need for education, greater understanding and inexpensive, environmentally friendly products for women and girls to manage their periods.

Our Freedom Kit Bags are a delight bringing comfort, dignity and the freedom to live without harmful constraints and practices.

There are still far too many taboos and harmful practices. Yet in all these places we are warmly welcomed and everyone is keen for our education. Change is happening, albeit slowly.



Thank you

Support from so many organisations, many of whom give regularly, has helped to make this happen.

There are too many organisations and individuals to list here. The trustees simply wish to acknowledge this tremendous support and say a heart-felt "Thank you" to all who have given.

And 34,000 women and girls from Nepal say a grateful "dhanyabad".

Women and girls continue to tell their stories; the following two accounts given in earlier reports are, sadly, still common stories and worth repeating. They show our work is far from finished.

Adolescent Girl (Rupandehi): "I found today's program very impactful. Despite being a science student, I couldn't openly discuss menstruation before. Now, I feel confident to speak up and share this knowledge in my school, emphasizing that menstruation is neither shameful nor something to hide. You must visit my school as well." She shared a tragic incident where her close friend, after being mocked by boys for dropping a

disposable pad, could not bear the humiliation and committed suicide. This event deeply affected her and inspired her desire to work on this issue.

Rekha: *"When I had my first period, I was very young, and it happened on the day of my uncle's wedding. When I saw the blood, I cried because I didn't know what it was. I told my mother, and she explained that it was a normal thing that all girls go through. My mother was understanding and did not believe in the old customs, but my father was very traditional and separated me from everyone, telling me I couldn't go near anyone, not even in the kitchen, the temple, or participate in the wedding. There were many guests, and everyone was enjoying the wedding, but I was isolated. No one gave me food for two days; I only drank water. I felt like I had committed a sin for having my period, and I still haven't been able to forget how terrible I felt."*

Funds

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. Our accounts are set out below

The charity's reserves at 30 June 2025 reduced to £77,527. The trustees intend to hold a reserve to enable production and distribution to continue for around nine months. It's very important for our sewing rooms to plan ahead and we want to give them the confidence to do so. Maintaining a reserve enables that and helps protect against fluctuating income.

Our income for the year reduced to £99,196. Many of our donors are repeat supporters and we understand that for some they will have a limit on how often they can support a cause. We, therefore, put in considerable effort to find new supporters and this is not easy in a crowded space.

Our charitable expenditure at £84,279 was a planned increase over the year. Currently we are benefitting from a strong exchange rate of around £1=167npr to 185npr over the year; in 2019 it was closer to £1=145npr. The stronger exchange rate has offset local inflation.

The Other Expenses shown in the accounts include bank charges transferring funds to Nepal and some UK print costs for our newsletter. The contribution the charity made to the trustees costs of visiting Nepal to see things first hand are also included. The trustees also personally contribute to these costs.

These visits allow us to monitor the sewing rooms, working conditions and practices, attend distributions, meet with local government and health workers. This gives us valuable insight, helps maintain high standards and gives assurance as to the controls and effectiveness of the programme.

Our next visit will be in October 2026 and so for the current financial year 2025/26 there will not be a trustee visit and no costs arising.

Accounts

For the period 1 July 2024 – 30 June 2025

	2024/25 £	2023/234 £
Receipts		
Grants and donations	99,196	118,981
Payments		
Charitable activities	84,279	74,525
Cost of Fundraising	17,448	16,793
Other expenses	7,465	959
Total cost	109,191	92,276
Surplus/(Deficit)	(9,995)	26,705
Cash and bank at 1 July 2024	87,522	
Total reserves	77,527	
Represented by		
Cash and bank at 30 June 2025	77,527	

Notes to the Accounts:

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

We 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.

We have partnerships in place that can sustain our work over the coming years and increasingly draw on local resources.

Digitally signed on behalf of the trustees:

BRIAN MILDENHALL

Mr Brian Mildenhall
3 March 2026

Section A

Independent Examiner's Report

Report to the trustees/
members of

Freedom Kit Bags

On accounts for the year
ended30th June 2025Charity 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 30/06/2025.

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.

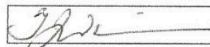
Independent
examiner's statement

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:

4/2/2026

Name:

Terry John Williams

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

Retired accountant

Address:

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