

Dorcas Dress Project - 2024-25

Trustees' Report

Aims (Public Benefit Statement)

The Dorcas Dress Project charitable goal is:

The object of the CIO is the relief of financial hardship anywhere in the world by providing sewing equipment, training and support to enable individuals to generate a sustainable income and be self-sufficient and to do so using Christian values and for the public benefit.

Structure & Governance

Trustees (as of end of financial year)

Name	Role
Nana Boakye	Trustee (Interim Chair)
Kojo Amoasi	Trustee (Treasurer)
Helen Barbara Jacobs	Trustee
Oluyomi Segun	Trustee

Trustees are:

- Likely to contribute 4-5 hours a month towards their work for the charity.
- Appointed for a term of 3 years and can be reappointed for up to a further 2 terms. Our governing document stipulates a minimum of 3 and maximum of 7 Trustees.

Updates:

- Departing trustees:
 - Due to personal circumstances, 2 of our Trustees (Hannah Harrison and Hasna Khatun) stepped down from their roles.
 - Melissa Russon stepped down.
 - We thank them for their time and commitment towards the charity.
- We have welcomed two new trustees Helen and Yomi to join the existing team.
- Nana Boakye has been appointed Chair following an interim post from Sept 2024-March 2025
- Kojo is continuing as treasurer until we recruit a new one.
- Yomi has been appointed as secretary.

Executive Team

Name	Role
Maria Skoyles	CEO

Maria is employed as CEO with increased hours from 2 to 3 days a week through an appropriate salary adjustment. This is all thanks to a strong financial position through various charity donations listed in the financial section. This funding, and therefore the additional staff time, will support Maria's work locally and internationally.

Staff

- 5 paid staff

As the charity is growing and with it the burden of the work, we would like to explore employing additional staff in the 2025-26 financial year and beyond.

Volunteers

- 30+ volunteers across the hubs

The Dorcas Dress Project relies on volunteers in each hub to serve their local community. Our UK hubs have 10 volunteers across the network, linked to local churches for Safeguarding purposes. Our Africa hubs are structured differently, attached to local organisations that use The Dorcas Dress Project resources as a means of supporting local people living in financial hardship. We purchase dresses from these hubs, providing income to set up people's own small enterprises.

Status

We are a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registered with the Charity Commission, no. 1177034.

Objectives for 2024-25

Governance objectives:

- Set up a Trustee recruitment procedure.
- Improve decision-making and reporting procedures.
 - Review governing documents.
 - Explore what is needed for a full CIO annual report.
 - Proposal doc for meeting items
 - Review safeguarding procedures
- Improve links between the Trustee and hubs teams.
 - Set up monthly check-ins with hubs over WhatsApp.

Financial objectives:

- Continue to improve financial oversight and reporting systems.
 - Re-balance financial oversight between CEO and Treasurer
 - Be “full year” finance report ready throughout the year.
- Review and implement reserves policy for coming years.

Operational objectives:

- Continue to grow the staff team.
- Build a sustainable marketing strategy, within an agreed budget.
- Continue to grow our hubs internationally and in the UK.
 - Maintain the sewing hubs we have started in Africa.
 - Continue to support the new hub started in Bangalore/India
 - Expand Oxfordshire sewing hubs
- Expand hubs into Asia
- Focus hubs
- Common Purse

Spiritual objectives:

- Explore who we are as a church and how to build a sustainable international community that serves all its members, practically and spiritually.

Performance against Objectives

Governance objectives

We have successfully recruited a new interim chair and a secretary via a robust recruitment procedure. The same steps will be taken to recruit a new treasurer next year.

We have reviewed all the policies (with special focus on safeguarding procedures) and will structure interval follow up reviews/updates. This will form part of the new secretary's role with a spreadsheet to keep track.

Operational objectives

- Continue to grow the staff team.
- Build a sustainable marketing strategy, with a realistic budget.
- Continue to grow our hubs internationally and in the UK.
 - Maintain the sewing hubs we have started in Africa.
 - Started the Bangalore/India hub
 - New Oxfordshire sewing hubs- We are awaiting the outcome from Oxford Community Church (OCC).
- Expand hubs into Asia: Maria travelled to India for 2 weeks during which she successfully helped the team set up a hub
- The focus team established 2023 continues to thrive with periodically scheduled meetings arranged via zoom to discuss proposed projects and support/guidance available.

- Common Purse- This initiative aims to provide emergency funds to assist urgent needs and reduce barriers to participation in sewing hubs. Trustees assess applications and approve funds for uses such as mobile data, sewing tools, transportation, food, additional workspace safety resources.
- RWA project in Bristol- April this year DDP was given the opportunity to exhibit new textiles as part of supporting refugees in the city to tell their stories of 'sharing love'.

Spiritual objectives

Explore who we are as a worshipping community and how to build a sustainable international community that serves all its members, practically and spiritually.

Exploring how our community can grow in faith, serve one another, worship together and have an impact on the injustices and environmental concerns the global fashion industry generates. We need to improve our internet and online access provision to do this, engage partners in learning conversations and completing research. This will involve engaging in learning conversations with up to 4 sewing hubs across our global network.

Explore who we are as a church and how to build a sustainable international community that serves all its members, practically and spiritually. We have a thriving prayer group which has provided a community and experienced God answering prayers.

Financials objectives

Summary

In the 2024-25 financial year, the Dorcas Dress Project saw a significant step up in funding and charitable activity.

Successful efforts to strengthen funding for the UK and international hubs, via grants, match-funded donation campaigns and direct donations have allowed the charity to expand reach and invest more into the hubs. Further income has come from growth in dress sales. This included increasing existing working hours, hiring staff to work in hubs and providing much needed materials and resources to the hubs. It has also put the charity in a position to be able to plan further into the future, and to be more ambitious. In the upcoming year, we expect these efforts to increase funding and dress sales to continue.

As with the last few years, a significant expense has been paying staff, but part of the increased hours has come directly from restricted funds. The total payment given to our UK and international dress makers has increased, as well as other charitable activities related to our hubs. As the charity expands the number of hubs as well as the amount of training/stock produced at our existing hubs, we expect these figures to increase in the upcoming financial year.

How the charity reviews and reports finances internally has improved significantly. Building upon changes made in the 2023-24 financial year, the efforts have enabled the trustees to have more frequent and more granular views of the charity finances. The treasurer and trustees will aim to make further improvements in this area to at a minimum meet legal obligations but also to ensure the right level of visibility to match the nature of the charity in its current position.

2024-25 set a good course for both doing more with the funds the charity has been entrusted with, aligned with the charitable objective and securing further funds to sustain and grow, and we expect 2025-26 to be a continuation in this direction. Operationally, notable changes expected in 2025-26 would be moving funds not required in the near term into a savings account, more regular use and review of reporting, and managing the increased complexity of paying extra staff.

Structure

To provide context on the information below and to aid understanding the full financial reports accompanying this document, the charity's finances can be grouped as following:

- Banking
 - The stores of cash used by the charity, the main being our Natwest charity account, but also PayPal and "Reimbursable Expenses". "Reimbursable Expenses" covers some transactions which were paid for outside of our traditional bank process and then later settled, but these activities still were made by staff and aligned with the objectives of the charity. In the previous year's accounts, Reimbursable Expenses were named Petty Cash.
- Dress stock
 - The wholesale value of dresses held by the charity. Together dresses and cash held by the charity constitute the assets held.
- Income (non-dress sale related)
 - Unrestricted/unreserved - primarily donations received from individuals and businesses (as grants), which don't have a requirement the money must be used for a specific purpose.
 - Restricted - donations received which are intended for the facilitation of the production of dresses in a specific hub (sponsorship) or to provide support, training and other resources (restricted support). In reports these are listed as future liabilities, to correctly capture that we expect to spend this money exclusively for the given purpose, or to return it.
- Sales income and related costs
 - Primarily modelled as costs paid for the production of dresses and revenue received by dress sales. Other lines in reports cover aspects such as the appreciation of dresses comparing cost to wholesale price and sale price - wholesale price.
- Wages and related costs
 - Costs relating to paying staff, contributing to pensions and paying relevant tax.
- Charitable activity

- Activity related to hubs that aren't directly related to paying for dresses, such as providing training and paying for equipment and resources. This sometimes includes paying dress makers for dresses that can't be sold on but were useful to increase experience and confidence.
- Other overheads
 - Areas such as marketing, bank charges and paying for postage for dress delivery/returns.

Grants, Dress Sales and Other Income

At the end of the year, Dorcas Dress Project had £41,620 (+22,739) in total assets, split between £31,976 (+18,418) in cash and £9,643 in dresses (stock) (+4,365). Compared to the previous financial year (direct comparisons in brackets), this presents a strong 54% increase, primarily due to notable grants received in the year and an increase in the number of dresses received. The total reimbursable expenses was -£559 compared to £45 the previous financial year, as charity needed to settle travel expenses that occurred in the financial year but reimbursed at the beginning of 2025-26.

Grants

A subset of the grants and business donations received in the year:

- Oxfordshire - biggest contributors of restricted funds: NLCF (~£17,000), Mothers' Union (~£3,000, see further details below) and West Oxfordshire District Council (£3,000), total restricted ~£23,900
- Bangalore: Basingstoke Community Church, ~£2,100
- New hubs in Oxfordshire: Cherwell District Council and Didcot Powerhouse ~£6,900)

Donations and match funding:

- Big Give for international projects: (~£6,900)
- Personal donations: (~£918)

Dress sales:

- ~£5600 sales revenue, up 84%
- ~£1600 profit from dress sales (on top of wholesale price), a 3x increase
- ~£2650 appreciation on dress stock received (difference between amount paid to dress makers and wholesale price), down 14%

Funding for Mothers' Union project

The Mothers' Union entered into partnership with the charity to make dresses for members, which is an exciting new endeavour. £3,000 of funding was generously provided to enable work towards this project.

Funding Dress Makers, Charitable Activity and Other Outgoings

Staff payments

The majority of the outgoings from Dorcas Dress Project are related to staff pay. This has increased this year to cover extra work required in Oxfordshire (funded via NLCF), pay increases and adding freelancers/staff to the organisation.

- Salary and pension costs were £18,800, the vast majority paying the CEO but also funding 5 new members of staff at the end of the year
- NLCF funding was used for an additional day's work from the CEO towards the growth and development of the Oxfordshire hubs

Direct and indirect funding of dress makers

Total cost of production of dresses was £6,602 (the previous year's figures unfortunately do not enable an equivalent comparison). These include direct funding to dress makers, i.e. paying them for dresses they have made, and indirect funding, which includes payments for the dress material.

Charitable activity

Charitable activity is the support given to the hubs in the UK and abroad outside of directly paying for dresses and the materials used to make them. The hubs with the largest amount of charitable activity was the Oxfordshire hubs, partly due to the age (Oxfordshire hubs are relatively new and older hubs become more self-sustaining after training etc. has been given).

Hub Location	Amount (£)
Oxfordshire	10,117
Nigeria	406
Kampala, Uganda	50
Teso, Uganda	487
Tanzania	392
Burundi	651
Kenya	535
Bangalore	3,470

New Initiatives

Two new initiatives under charitable activity:

- Focus Groups
 - Bringing together core leaders to aid better organisation and dissemination of information throughout the various hubs. Payments were made to

representatives to account for the cost of joining the meetings, e.g. internet access. £2814 was spent including time from the CEO towards the effort.

- Common Purse
 - The common purse initiative was set up to provide a structured and funding way to help the emergency needs of the dress makers that might impair them from participating in their work with the charity. £276 was allocated with no expenditure in the year.

Operational/misc.

Processes and reporting

The 2024-25 year saw further efforts to improve how finances were managed and reported. The treasurer and CEO worked together to improve how activity was tracked in Sage Accounting, as well as outside in spreadsheets for tracking dress stock via SKU IDs and reporting ahead of each trustee meeting. This has made it much easier to track individual stock items moving from dressmaker to the eventual buyer, and regular and clear information about pay and other expenses.

Reserves policy and restricted funds

The reserves policy was instituted at the end of the 2023-24 year, and fortunately the charity has been well above the reserve amount for the entirety of the 2024-25 year, but the policy needs to be updated in the upcoming year to correct account for new expenditure on pay and restricted funds.

On restricted funds, the charity has received a significant increase in these funds and fortunately processes around tracking their balance and use has also improved. Further efforts in this direction will be essential for the upcoming year to make good on obligations to donors.

Looking forward

For the financial year ahead (2025-26), operation areas that should make the charity more financially stable and increase visibility include:

- Budgeting: more regularly relying on thorough budgeting, and comparing spend against those budgets. This will make future spending more predictable and help to spotlight blindspots and inefficiencies.
- Continual review of expectations and processes
- Treasurer recruitment: efforts to recruit a new treasurer were made in the 2024-25 financial year but a viable candidate was not found. A new recruitment round will occur in 2025-26, building upon the learnings from the previous round.
- Moving away from Natwest: the charity intends to move to an organisation focused around providing accounts for charities, as well as moving the funds not needed in the immediate term to savings accounts.
- More complex projects like Mothers' Union project, and meeting the need for better management

Plans and Challenges 2025-26

Growing the Trustee team

As the charity grows, so do the responsibilities of the Trustees. We plan to use our new recruitment process to increase the size of the Trustee team. As part of this, we may need to review our constitution which stipulates that we can have 3-7 people on the Trustee team.

Recruiting a new Treasurer

Over the past year, we've been blessed with a Treasurer with a good head for numbers and a commitment to see the charity thrive. Thanks to his work, we've been able to identify gaps in our financial knowledge and understanding and we've recognised the need for specialist financial experience within our team. Our current Treasurer wanted to step down from the Treasurer role (while continuing as a Trustee) to make space for someone with relevant financial experience. However, we were unable to recruit a suitable applicant, and the role will be readvertised.

Expanding our network in the UK.

We have worked hard to serve the asylum-seeking, refugees and wider networks of people living in financial hardships across Oxfordshire. It makes sense to develop this program as other organisations have been keen to work with us and support additional hubs in towns across the county. Maria is currently in talks with Oxford Oxfordshire Churches to develop our county hub network. She is also in talks with people in Somerset and the Midlands too. The Royal West of England Academy (RWA) project in Bristol is ongoing with an art exhibition Summer 2025 and a Bristol hub is also under development.