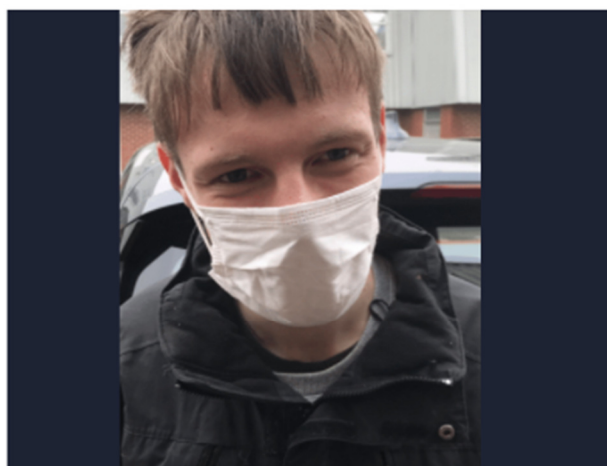


# Stepping Forward

A full life for everyone affected by disability



## ANNUAL REPORT 2019 to 2020



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# INTRODUCTION

Stepping Forward works to facilitate and accelerate access to essential services, information, resources and life opportunities so that all people affected by disability can live a full life. In the UK we run disability awareness sessions in schools, disability confident training and support individuals and families to access essential support and equipment. Our international work aims to provide a catalyst for change. We support practical initiatives that are having an impact on the lives of people with disabilities and support their replication and sustainability. We support changemakers with the resources to increase their effectiveness and provide opportunities for networking and influencing policy locally and internationally. We facilitate access to relevant training opportunities for disabled people and those working to promote the rights of people with disabilities.

One billion people, or 15% of the global population, experience some form of disability, but the rights of disabled people are being inadequately protected and promoted. The coronavirus has exposed horrific inequalities and further underlined the need for urgent change.

Disabled people make up two-thirds of coronavirus deaths in the UK, according to figures by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The ONS estimates that disabled people are up to 11 times more likely to die of the virus. ONS analysis suggests deprivation and housing are key factors – disabled people are more likely to live in poverty than others – as well as medical failings that mean doctors often overlook disabled people's health concerns. Chris Hatton, Professor of Social Care at Manchester Metropolitan University, said reviews into the deaths of people with learning disabilities from Covid-19 identified "systemic failure from services designed to help them". Hatton said: "People with learning disabilities who died of Covid-19 experienced systemic failure from services designed to help them, including failures of infection control, PPE, testing, identifying when people's health was deteriorating, and a range of discriminatory practices including Do Not Resuscitate notices being used on grounds of 'frailty' or 'learning disabilities'."

Throughout lockdown, social care was stripped back 'to the point of danger and indignity' (Ryan 2020), and services for disabled children in many areas all but disappeared. Research by Carers UK found that 81% of carers have been taking on more responsibilities since the beginning of the pandemic. And as the economy is hit and cuts are made, disabled people are being hard hit: Citizens Advice reports that 27% of disabled workers are facing redundancy due to COVID. This rises to 48% of those in the "shielded" category.

We have been responding during the COVID-19 pandemic by delivering our benefits advice service by telephone; offering support with funding applications for families needing equipment and other resources; dropping activity and support packs off to families who are struggling during lockdown (with items secured from In-Kind Direct); doing shopping and prescription collection for disabled people who are shielding. We receive referrals from local authorities, the voluntary sector and local community-established COVID-groups.

COVID-19 has clearly highlighted that much work needs to be done as a matter of urgency to ensure that the rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities are met.

# UK WORK

We provide practical support to disabled people and their families and carers. We undertake sensitisation and awareness work in the community that contributes towards social change. Despite progress in equality legislation and improved access to public spaces, negative public attitudes and awkwardness towards disability remain commonplace.

## Disability Awareness

Disability awareness is a neglected issue which receives little priority and few resources. However failure to invest in this area has multiple impacts on the rights of people with disabilities. In April 2017 the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities published its 'list of issues' for the UK and has asked the UK government to report on multiple issues of concern, including how it is addressing disability-related harassment and bullying of disabled children in schools and how the UK is tackling negative attitudes, in particular towards people with dementia or learning disabilities.

Our training is run by disabled people and is delivered by independent trainers or through collaboration with partner organisations such as JustDifferent. We have worked with Disability Rights UK to deliver 'disability confident' training courses, targeted at anyone wanting to increase their awareness of disability issues or gain more confidence working with and supporting disabled colleagues or customers. This year our booked sessions were cancelled due to COVID restrictions.

## Advice & Support

Our Disability Advice and Support Service developed further this year. Funding from Awards for All and the Berkshire Community Foundation enabled us to support to individuals and families who are experiencing difficulties to access essential resources and support. Our part-time DLA/PIP Adviser assists in the application process for disability-related benefits. With so many disabled people and carers facing changed circumstances due to COVID-19, including a reduction in income, it is very hard for people to know what support is available. Many people do not know that they can claim carers allowance for instance. We are receiving referrals from agencies, schools and from individuals and community members are recommending us via social media groups:

We also ran one-to-one Advice Clinics where we identify the resource needs that are preventing individuals and families from living a full life. We have been able to take this service into special schools and secure significant practical support for children with disabilities. This direct support to individuals and families addresses the impact of disability on social isolation, increased living costs, the need for specialist equipment and provides access to supported breaks. The support that we have managed to secure this year has included the costs of special needs buggies, extra strong furniture, iPads and sensory equipment.

## Bringing Organisations Together

The 2019 Winter Ball raised over £11,000 for organisations working on disability issues. Stepping Forward coordinates this annual fundraising and networking ball for organisations working on disability issues in Reading, involving seven local charities including Autism Berkshire, Parenting Special Children, The Engine Shed, Green Health Thames Valley and the Berkshire MS Therapy Centre. Individually most local disability charities do not have the capacity to put on a large-scale event such as a Ball. By coming together, with the generous support of local companies and Foundations, we are able to hold an enjoyable event that raises substantial funds for organisations that are experiencing a severe shortage of resources.



## Creating A Disability Hub in Reading

Much of the year has been spent raising funds for the creation of a Disability Hub for use by organisations and individuals affected by disability in Reading and the wider Berkshire area where we are based. We were delighted to start the year with a pledge of £25,000 towards The Hub from The Earley Charity. We continued to fundraise throughout the year, though support for capital projects became more difficult to access once lockdown started in March 2020.

Whilst online information is vital and accessible, our experience is that a community of shared interest is also an essential source of information and support and can play a transformative role the lives of people living with disabilities. The building is a resource that has become increasingly relevant – with many predicting that the voluntary sector will suffer greatly from COVID-19, the Hub adds capacity and support to the sector at very difficult time, with many charities forced to reduce services or threatened with closure.

The Disability Hub will be accessible to all local groups working on disability. It contains a meeting room, two/three small offices and a space for hot-desking along with disabled toilet facilities. Services will include our Disability Advice & Support Service and other organisations have asked to have pop-up services there. Prior to COVID-19, many organisations were using the building for support groups, trustee meetings and training sessions. Our landlord has kindly extended the option to buy agreement and we expect to complete the purchase in the next financial year.



# International Work

Disability prevalence is higher for developing countries; globally an estimated 80% of people with disabilities live in developing countries. We work internationally with Disabled People's organisations and NGOs to promote the rights of people with disabilities, supporting practical initiatives (such as a bus for a special needs school in Sierra Leone) whilst also supporting strategic work which can lead to transformative change.

## Autism Initiatives

Building on the outcomes of the Pan-African Experiences of Autism Conference in 2017, we have continued to support the Sierra Leone Autistic Society (SLAS) with their autism awareness-raising activities as well as with developing further their support to children and families. This year SLAS began to create an Autism Inclusion Centre in Freetown, with two outreach Hubs in the rural districts. We have provided technical support to this important work as well as shipped practical equipment, large quantities of hand sanitiser, period products and educational materials for use in the new Centre. As a result of the 2017 Autism Conference, SLAS Director Mary Penn-Timothy featured in an award-winning film named after - and based on - the bestselling book 'The Reason I Jump'. This has brought further awareness of SLAS's vital work and the urgent need for greater awareness-raising and support for services.

Stepping Forward and the Sierra Leone Autistic Society continue to work with the Witchcraft & Human Rights Network which is developing a coordinated response to the widespread violations of human rights that take place around the world due to beliefs in witchcraft and spirit possession, including the development of a UN Resolution.

## Support to People With Albinism

We have been able to provide support to the Sierra Leone Association of People With Albinism (SLAPWA) in the form of skin cream, protective clothing as well as hand sanitisers this year. Most items were secured from Inkind Direct and we are grateful for this support.

# Supporting Our Work

Thank you to those people and companies who have supported us during this very difficult year. We hope to conclude the Disability Hub purchase in the forthcoming financial year and continue to apply to Trusts and Foundations for ongoing support. Where possible, we will be having a programme of events over the coming year to generate further funds.

If anyone would like to run a marathon, hold a cake sale or organise a fundraising event for Stepping Forward, we would be very grateful and can help with publicity and materials.

*Our sincere thanks to everyone who has supported our work this year.*

Signed: ..........Rod Leith, Chair

# FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2019 - 2020

## Income

	Restricted	Unrestricted	Total	<i>Prev yr</i>
Event income	0	7,066	7,066	9,405
Misc donations	0	7,131	7,131	10,886
Grants:				
Awards for All	9,970	0	9,970	9,900
Clothworkers Foundation	1,597	0	1,597	
Berkshire Community Foundation	6,211	0	6,211	6,400
Screwfix	4,000	0	4,000	
Other grants	3,052	8,000	11,052	18,276
Hub rental income	0	12,735	12,735	800
Consultancy	0	6,895	6,895	
Total income	24,830	41,827	66,658	55,667



## Expenditure

	Restricted	Unrestricted	Total	Prev yr
Event costs	0	9,752	9,752	11,316
Disability Advice Service	8,667	2,510	11,177	16,977
Charitable activities	0	892	892	
Fundraising costs	0	173	173	
Hub costs:	0	0		3,475
Hub accessibility improvements	0	7,500	7,500	
Other Hub costs	0	18,239	18,239	
General Office Costs	0	787	787	2,609
Other costs			0	8,370
Total expenditure	8,667	39,853	48,520	42,748
<b>Surplus of income over expenditure</b>	<b>16,163</b>	<b>1,974</b>	<b>18,138</b>	<b>12,919</b>

## Balance Sheet

Opening bank balance	10,282	9,197	19,479	6,560
Movement	16,163	1,974	18,138	12,919
Closing bank balance	26,445	11,172	37,617	19,479
check			37,617	19,479

Signed by



Andrew K C Graves,  
Independent Examiner  
28th Nov 2020



Rod Leith  
Chair