



# ANNUAL REPORT AND **ACCOUNTS** **2023–2024**

A FULL LIFE FOR DISABLED PEOPLE AND CARERS

# INTRODUCTION

Stepping Forward works to facilitate and accelerate access to essential services, information, resources and life opportunities so that all disabled people and carers 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. For disabled people in the UK, a steep rise in the cost of living and ongoing cuts to government support continue to push many into extreme hardship. Our Disability Advice Service is extremely busy as people come to us for support with benefits, equipment and resources.

In the year 2023-2024, we cannot talk about disability internationally without mentioning Gaza, which is now 'home to the largest number of amputee children in modern history' (UN 2024). An average of 30 children a day undergo amputations, many without anaesthetic. We know that disabled people are always the worst affected in conflict situations and doctors in Gaza say that the deaths related to disease and non-battle injuries are many, and largely unrecorded. These deaths will be due to the lack of medication and ongoing supervision for diabetes, epilepsy, heart conditions, hypertension, and antibiotics for all types of infections. These additional deaths are estimated to number around 200,000 people (Dr Amer Shoaib 2024).

Stepping Forward is committed to working with partners on raising the profile of the rights of disabled people and offering practical assistance wherever possible.



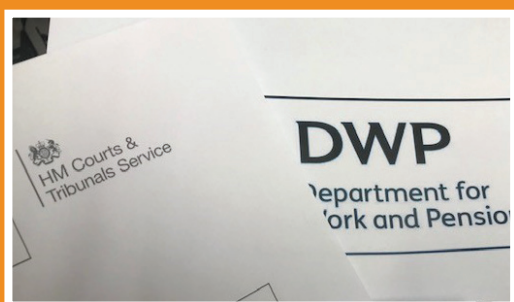
## Stepping Forward UK

Registered Charity No. 1177955

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Street, Reading, RG4 5AF  
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# 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.



Our Benefits Adviser attends court most weeks, supporting people with tribunals.



Our Advice Service is helping people to access essential equipment.

## DISABILITY ADVICE AND SUPPORT SERVICE

Our Disability Advice and Support Service continued to deliver sessions and support this year. Funding from Awards for All, The Postcode Society Trust and other trusts and foundations enabled us to support individuals and families who are experiencing difficulties accessing essential resources and support. Our part-time Benefits Adviser has supported increasing numbers of people with applications, appeals and tribunals. We are seeing many disabled people and carers facing a reduction in income and changes to their benefits, and there is significant concern about the proposed changes to the support available for disabled people. Initial projections indicate that millions of disabled people will be negatively impacted.

We are receiving referrals from agencies, schools, refugee groups and from individuals. Community members continue to recommend us via social media groups related to disability.

The other dimension of our Advice service is the one-to-one sessions where we identify the resource needs that are preventing individuals and families from living a full life. As well as holding face to face meetings in our office, when invited we 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. If requested, we accompany people to doctor/paediatrician appointments, to school meetings and elsewhere to ensure that our clients' needs are heard, documented and responded to appropriately.

The practical support that we manage to secure for clients includes specialist furniture, mobility aids, waterproof mattresses, and IT and communication equipment.



## DISABILITY AWARENESS

**Why do young people go through 14 years of schooling and yet receive no education about disability issues? How can we develop the necessary understanding, acceptance, accommodation and infrastructure to ensure the rights of disabled people are met if we do not create the opportunities to learn about disability?**

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.

Our disability awareness training is developed and delivered by disabled people. This work plays an important role in creating a better future for us all; disability awareness promotes inclusion, understanding and acceptance and benefits everyone. A third of people become disabled in their working life. We believe that disability awareness is an essential part of quality education and life-long learning; disability is part of the human experience, affecting friends, family and community.

## BRINGING ORGANISATIONS TOGETHER

Our annual Winter Draw once again raised more than £5,000 for local charitable organisations and groups working on disability issues. Organisations benefiting this year included Autism Berkshire, The Engine Shed, Rivertime Boat Trust, Reading Mencap, Medical Assistance Sierra Leone and the Berkshire MS Therapy Centre (who sold the winning ticket to a supporter!). We are grateful to The David Brownlow Foundation for funding the prize of John Lewis vouchers, enabling us to raise substantial funds for ourselves and other organisations that are experiencing a severe shortage of resources.

We were pleased to be part of the IJAM Festival for young disabled people that took place in Reading in July. We sponsored the fully accessible toilet for this wonderful community event that aimed to create a festival that all young people could enjoy.

## THE DISABILITY HUB

The Hub continues to be a vital resource for the community. Local organisation, Autangel, led by autistic adults, shares the space which is used for training and support groups.

The Hub adds capacity and support to the sector at very difficult time, with many charities forced to reduce services, move out of offices or threatened with closure. The Disability Hub is available free of charge to all local groups working on disability issues, and at reduced costs to other voluntary sector groups. The Hub contains a meeting room, two/three small offices and a space for hot-desking along with disabled toilet facilities. There is plenty of free parking outside.

We are a building and a resource offering support and advice on a range of issues related to disability, as well as a place for people to connect and create community. We have supported other organisations to access space in the business park and a new community of interest with shared goals for social justice is developing in this corner of Reading.

Currently four local disability organisations use the Hub as their registered address; others use the space for pop-up sessions, and meeting people for advice sessions. We also store items for a number of local charities in our store room where we have installed rack shelving.

In response to many small and micro-organisations now facing closure due to funding difficulties, Stepping Forward continued to offer support with funding applications in the reporting year, assisting organisations to maintain essential support and services.

This year the office unit above us became unexpectedly available for sale, at a very reasonable price, and Trustees decided to explore ways in which we could take on this space to expand our offer to the community. By the end of the financial year we had secured a loan from Charity Bank, enabling us to purchase the unit above, doubling our available space. We are now renting this out to a local disability organisation who deliver recreational activities for children and adults. We are open to disability organisations buying this space from us: our priority was to secure resources for the voluntary sector, and organisations supporting disabled people in particular, as the sector is being priced out of Reading and the surrounding areas. Without affordable spaces to meet for advice, support and recreational activities the voluntary sector will become weaker and provision for disabled people will be negatively impacted. Development initiatives must include the needs of all community members.

# INTERNATIONAL WORK

Disability prevalence is higher in 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 (eg transport, essential medication, university fees) whilst also supporting strategic work which can lead to transformative change.



Director Gibrilla Jalloh and Mary Penn-Timity, Chair of the Browne-Penn Autism School, Sierra Leone give a guided tour of the school May 2024.

## AUTISM INITIATIVES

We continue to support the Sierra Leone Autistic Society, and shipped some resources for the autism school this year. The relationship that was established with Met Film after the release of the award-winning film 'The Reason I Jump' (which featured the work of SLAS) has continued. We have been able to work with Met Film to generate more resources for the work of the Sierra Leone Autistic Society. One of our trustees was able to visit SLAS and the school in Sierra Leone in May 2024 and we continue to explore ways to support this important work.



Protective sunscreen reduces skin cancer and saves lives.

## SUPPORT TO PEOPLE WITH ALBINISM

People with albinism in Sierra Leone face disabling stigma and are not expected to live beyond their thirties due to skin cancer. There is much that can be done to increase the life expectancy of people with albinism and we are working with the Sierra Leone Association of People With Albinism (SLAPWA) to provide support such as sunscreen, umbrellas, protective clothing, hats and sunglasses. We are collaborating with local environmental NGO Green Ways to source quality protective clothing items and have been able to secure free shipping from a generous supporter. We were able to buy and ship a variety of recommended skin care products, and some protective hats, much of it secured at substantially reduced costs from Inkind Direct. We are grateful for this support.

## SUPPORTING OUR WORK

Thank you to those people and companies who have supported us during this year. This includes Visa Reading who collected bras at their offices on Earth Day in April. These bras were sent to mothers of disabled children in Sierra Leone to sell as part of an income generating initiative.

Our Trustees continue to apply to Trusts and Foundations for ongoing support, and volunteers help us with raffles, Ebay sales and stalls in the community. We will be having a programme of events over the coming year to generate further funds. Supporters who would like to run a marathon, hold a cake sale or organise a fundraising event for Stepping Forward, can contact us for help with publicity and materials.

### Some of our supporters this year:

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Prepared by Stepping Forward UK Trustees

**26 May 2025**

Main photo on front page and two images on page 2 used with thanks & credit to Pixabay; other photos taken by Trustees with permission.


# Financial Summary 2023-24

1 August 2023 to 31 July 2024

	Restricted	Unrestricted	Total	1 Aug 2022-31 July 2023
<b>Income</b>				
Consultancy		998	998	50
Grants				
Coop Community Fund	1787.98		1787.98	
Awards for All	9900		9900	
Souter Charitable Trust			0	3600
Shanly Foundation			0	3000
Screwfix Foundation			0	4500
Postcode Society Trust	18200		18200	
Met Film Production	8000		8000	10000
The Earley Charity			0	4088
Hub rental income		23140.9	23140.90	11945
Misc donations	3200	21979.14	25179.14	21464
Total income	41087.98	46118.04	87206.02	58647
<b>Expenditure</b>				
Albinism Project		418.50	418.50	300
Autism Sierra Leone	8028.50		8028.50	10034
Charitable Activities		7062.59	7062.59	3929
Disability Advice service	25166.76		25166.76	16750
Epilepsy Sierra Leone		1562.90	1562.90	6006
Epilepsy Uganda				277
Legal & professional fees		3580.78	3580.78	4574
Unit Purchase		10000.00	10000.00	
Fundraising costs		448.88	448.88	312
Gen Office expenses	239.07		239.07	519
Hub running costs		8190.71	8190.71	7053
Loan interest		11718.90	11718.90	
Raffle		1000.00	1000.00	1000
Ukraine				922
Volunteer costs		30.00	30.00	333
other costs				618
Total expenditure	33434.33	44013.26	77447.59	52627
Surplus of income over expendi	7653.65	2104.78	5,127	6,020
Opening bank balance	9,833	8,445	18,278	15,427
CBILS Loan/capital repayment		-4631.6	-4631.6	-3170
Surplus/ (loss)	7,654	2,105	9,758	6020
Closing bank balance	17,487	5,918	23,405	18278

## Balance Sheet

		<b>1 Aug 2022-31 July 2023</b>
Fixed asset = leasehold property Unit 1 and 2	290,000	140,000
Debtor		2,000
Current asset - cash at bank	23,405	18,278
Total assets	<u>313,405</u>	<u>160,278</u>
Liability - Co-Op CBILS loan	(8,236)	11,514
Charity Bank loan for Unit 12B	(138,632)	
Net balance sheet	<u>166,537</u>	<u>148,764</u>

Signed..... Sarah Snow, Trustee

Independent Examiner:.....

A. Graves 30 May 2025



## Independent examiner's report to the trustees of Stepping Forward UK

I report to the trustees on my examination of the accounts of the above CIO, Registered Charity number 1177955, for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024.

### Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

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

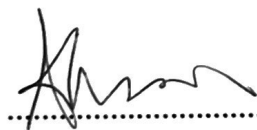
I report in respect of my examination of the CIO's accounts carried out under section 145 of the 2011 Act and in carrying out my examination, I have followed the applicable directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145 (5)(b) of the Act.

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:

- Accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 130 of the Act or;
- The accounts do not accord with the accounting records.

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

Signed



..... Independent Examiner

30 May 2025

MR ANDREW GRAVES