

# ANNUAL REPORT AND **ACCOUNTS**

2024-2025



# INTRODUCTION

Stepping Forward works to promote 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 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. This year we have supported many people from the refugee community with essential support, including mobility equipment. Our Disability Advice Service was nominated for a Pride of Reading Award by a client who we have successfully supported with benefits advice a number of times over the years.

Multiple conflicts are taking place across the world as we write the introduction to this report and research shows that disabled people are always the worst affected in conflict situations. We continue to raise awareness of the issues faced by disabled people during war, adding our voice to forums and petitions.

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

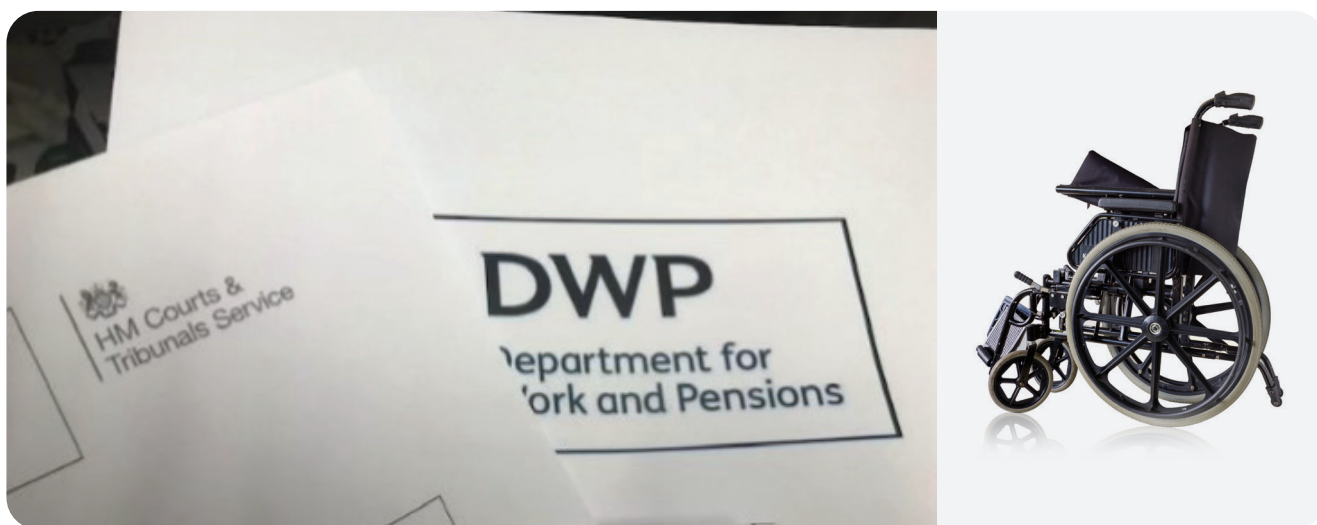
## **Stepping Forward UK**

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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.

## DISABILITY ADVICE AND SUPPORT SERVICE



Our Disability Advice and Support Service continued to deliver sessions and support this year. Funding from The National Lottery Community Fund's Awards for All, Berkshire Community Foundation, 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.

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. We have been present in the community at Reading Family Forum events where our stall attracted many visitors.

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. In the current funding climate we have found it increasingly difficult to secure grants for these sessions and will be making this area of work a greater priority over the next 12-18 months. Without education and awareness-raising on the rights of disabled people we will not see the changes that are urgently needed in our societies.

## 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.

Last 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. With a loan from Charity Bank we were able to secure the unit and we are now renting this space out to a local disability organisation who deliver recreational activities for children and adults. One year on this charity is now fundraising to buy the unit from us, having launched a capital campaign for this purpose.

We are delighted to have been able to secure a resource for an organisation supporting disabled people at a time when the voluntary 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. We are also pleased to 'pay it forward' as Stepping Forward also benefited from the generosity of a local benefactor who initially bought our unit and gave us time to run a successful capital campaign to buy the unit back from him. Reading is being transformed with new buildings and development but such initiatives must include services and facilities that meet 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.



*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 bought and shipped 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.

## AUTISM AND EPILEPSY INITIATIVES

We continue to support the Sierra Leone Autistic Society, and shipped appropriate play resources to the autism school in Freetown this year, as well as period products for pupils.

We collaborated with partner organisations who support people with epilepsy, sending a variety of resources (toiletries, period products, books, school shoes and bags) that were distributed to beneficiaries.

Our bra collection initiative enabled us to send hundreds of quality second-hand bras to mothers of disabled children through our networks – who then sold them on, generating an essential income. There are few income-generating opportunities for carers of children with disabilities in Sierra Leone, and lack of income is the key obstacle that disabled people and carers share with us in our work. Evidence shows that people with disabilities are often poorer than their non-disabled peers in terms of access to education, healthcare, employment, income, social support, and civic involvement. We continue to explore opportunities for increasing the household income of those with whom we work, and are looking closely at Universal Basic Income (UBI) models with colleagues in our network. We hope to report more on this soon.

## 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 again in April 2025. 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

*Images used in the report are taken by Stepping Forward or used with thanks and permission from Pixabay.*

**9 MAY 2026**


## Financial Summary 2024 to 2025

1 August 2024 to 31 July 2025

	Restricted	Unrestricted	Total	1 Aug 2023-31 July 2024
<b>Income</b>				
Consultancy		2000	2000	998
Grants				
Coop Community Fund				1787.98
Awards for All	19448		19448	9900
Berks Community Fdn	2500		2500	0
Reading Borough Council	7900		7900	0
Postcode Society Trust				18200
Met Film Production				8000
Hub rental income		22380	22380	23140.9
Misc donations	980	12427.61	13407.61	25179.14
Total income	30828	36807.61	67635.61	87206
<b>Expenditure</b>				
Albinism Project		807.71	807.71	418.5
Autism Sierra Leone		134.57	134.57	8028.5
Charitable Activities		2487.45	2487.45	7062.59
Disability Advice service	37517.6		37517.6	25166.76
Epilepsy Sierra Leone		257.55	257.55	1562.9
Legal & professional fees				3580.78
Unit Purchase				10000
Fundraising costs		921.13	921.13	448.88
Gen Office expenses		1215.97	1215.97	239.07
Hub running costs	1294.86	6960.87	8255.73	8190.71
Loan interest		11524.09	11524.09	11718.9
Raffle				1000
Volunteer costs		90	90	30
other costs				618
<b>Total expenditure</b>	38812.46	24399.34	63211.8	52627
Surplus of income over expenditure	-7984.46	12408.27	4423.81	6,020
Opening bank balance	17487	5918	23405	18,278
CBILS Loan/capital repayment		-5346.32	5346.32	-4631.6
Surplus/ (loss)	-7,984	12408.27	9,758	9758
Closing bank balance	9503	12980	22483	23405

## Balance Sheet as 31 July 2025

		1 Aug 2023-31 July 2024
Fixed asset = leasehold property Unit 1 and 2	290000	290,000
Debtor		0
Current asset - cash at bank	22483	23,405
Total assets	312483	313,405
Liability - Co-Op CBILS loan	-4,601	-8,236
Charity Bank loan for Unit 12B	-136,800	-138,362
Net balance sheet	171,082	166,537

Signed.....  ..... R. Leith, Trustee 29.5.26

Independent Examiner:.....  ..... Maria Baker MSc 29th May 2026



## **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 2025.

### **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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MT Baker', written in a cursive style.

Maria Baker MSc, Independent Examiner

29 May 2026