

The Open Table Network Trustees Annual Report

For the period 1st January-31st December 2024



The Open Table Network is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation no. 1193868 registered in England & Wales.

Objectives and activities

On 9th January 2024 the Charity Commission approved a change in the charitable object of the Open Table Network, which the trustees formally adopted as part of a revised constitution at the charity's Annual General Meeting on 12th March 2024:

The object of the CIO is the promotion of equality and diversity, and the relief of those in need for the public benefit, particularly in the area of LGBTQIA+ equality in religious organisations in the UK, by:

- building a network of mutually supportive communities for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex or asexual (LGBTQIA+) across the UK, to ensure they have equal access to a community where faith and LGBTQIA+ identities can be explored and celebrated in safe, non-judgmental spaces
- relieving mental and emotional distress, reducing social isolation and promoting mental, spiritual and physical well-being for isolated, unsupported LGBTQIA+ people who seek the potential well-being provided by a faith community but currently find no welcome, affirmation or tolerance in many faith communities, by training and supporting OTN community leaders to provide long-term unconditional welcome to LGBTQIA+ people, their families and friends
- providing activities and information to foster understanding between people from diverse backgrounds and cultivate a sentiment in favour of equality and diversity.

**'Open Table is a safe space for me, especially as a brown woman,
it's the only space I have never experienced racism...
I relate more to the homophobia they experience because of
the racism I experience, and that is special to me.'**

Summary of the main activities in relation to those purposes for the public benefit:

- Enables Open Table communities for LGBTQIA+ people hosted by affiliated churches.
- Resources Open Table communities, churches, individuals, and the wider community by providing signposting, training, events, materials and support.
- Maintains an online presence offering solidarity and signposting for LGBTQIA+ people.
- Works in partnership to share best practice and amplify marginalized voices.

The trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit.

Contribution made by volunteers:

As a growing partnership of communities across the UK, **we hugely valued the contributions of 363 volunteers across the 42 communities we supported in 2024** (35 existing communities and seven new communities). **119 were new to volunteering with OTN this year.**

Using data from our 2021 research into volunteer time contributions, we estimate that **OT volunteers gave around 3,641 hours a month in 2024 - an increase of 15% since 2023.**

Achievements and performance

At a time where most other public places welcome them equally, LGBTQIA+ people are still not always welcomed in UK churches. They are significantly more likely to experience mental distress, which research has shown relates explicitly to discriminatory pastoral practices of local churches.

In independent research into the experiences of OTN's community members in 2021:

- 56% said **being LGBTQIA+ is a barrier to belonging in a faith community**. 90% of our leaders and volunteers said being LGBTQIA+ is a barrier to belonging in a faith community for some or many of their community's members.
- On average, our members experienced a 40% **improvement in well-being** after joining an Open Table community.
- 87% feel **less isolated and more socially connected**.
- 92% said being part of an Open Table community **increased their sense of belonging**.
- 89% said being part of an Open Table community provided **a safe space** for them.

'It was a day I will never forget. After worrying about walking into places of worship many times, worried about people's reactions to me and my wife... for the first time I felt safe and at home in my faith. The more people that know about this safe place the better. It's a wonderful thing.'

Growth and impact in 2024:

We know these communities are needed, and the need is growing:

- In 2024 we supported **35 communities**, including one which relaunched after being unable to meet since 2021.
- We launched **seven new communities**, bringing the total to **37 active communities** at the end of 2024.
- We also supported **33 other churches** to explore whether to host an Open Table community.
- In 2024, the average number of monthly contacts across all our communities was 676, **an increase of 9%** on 2023.

Training and development initiatives:

Following a successful pilot in north-west England in 2022, OTN secured funding to offer hospitality training to volunteers from across the network in south-east England in 2024.

Well-being Through Welcome in-person training participants said this was:

- **'Thought provoking, useful, safe.'**
- **'Enlightening, dynamic, gave us a chance to connect with like-minded people from all over the UK.'**
- **'Informative and self-reflective.'**

We also offered two online workshops, including one on *Safer Braver Communities*, where participants shared that:

- **'Hearing the brave stories about how many people have unfortunately been hurt within the church made me feel more determined to get involved and support others.'**
- **'It was so vital to hear there are others like me and I feel much more positive about trying it to bring unity within the church and want to reach out to others who might feel alone too. I think the OTN is doing vital life-saving work.'**

**‘We have found Open Table to be a valuable addition to our ministry...
Indeed, in many ways it feels to me like a cornerstone of our church community.’**

Geographic expansion:

Of the seven new communities we launched in 2024, two are increasing the presence and reach of Open Table communities across Greater London, two are strengthening our support in the Midlands, one is in Cumbria which has previously had no Open Table community, one is on the south coast, boosting our presence in the South West, and one is on Merseyside, bringing the total in the region where OTN began to eight.

OTN's Secretary to the Trustees, who is experienced in international development, continues to respond to international enquiries by offering online support and signposting to local allies.

Digital presence and media:

Our podcast, *This is my story*, launched in 2023, continued to grow, with seven new episodes released in 2024. **In March 2024 the podcast was ranked third in the FeedSpot ‘5 Best Queer Bible Podcasts’.**

We grew our presence across several platforms:

- **Bluesky:** OTN joined in November 2024, averaging 77 engagements per month
- **Facebook:** Average monthly post reach = 6,359 (+45%)
- **Instagram:** Average monthly page reach = 545 (+14%)
- **LinkedIn:** 228 organisation profile followers (+12%).

‘Open Table Network, a truly wonderful group for LGBTQ in Christianity... How near I would be to an Open Table group is sincerely one of my criteria for moving house.’

Key partnerships and collaborations:

We worked with diverse partners to achieve our mission, including:

- **Edge Hill University:** Participated in interfaith panel discussion on 'Worldviews and Citizenship', with students from three Merseyside secondary schools in areas which host OT communities.
- **Inclusive Church:** Signposted every church with which we worked to resources from this educational charity. One of OTN's trustees is also a trustee on the Inclusive Church board.
- **Methodist Church in Britain:** OTN Director Kieran Bohan began part-time training for ordained ministry in the Methodist Church in October 2024.
- **Quest (for LGBT+ Catholics):** Co-hosted with them an annual LGBT+ Christian retreat weekend in North Wales which is always over-subscribed - clear evidence of need for more opportunities like this. Feedback included:
 - **‘Perfect balance between input and silence’.**
 - **‘Very imaginative material. So much to think about’.**
 - **‘In the current political and economic climate nationally and internationally, it is wonderful to focus on joy’.**
 - **‘I'm taking away a sense of being freed up, liberated, less alone, more trusting, more courageous and replenished’.**

- **United Reformed Church:** OTN's Director led two one-hour workshops on 'Creating safer sacred spaces for LGBT+ people' in the URC tent at the Greenbelt festival in August, engaging 60-80 people across the two workshops.

Community engagement:

OTN participated in several significant community projects, including:

- **An art exhibition** touring cathedrals and city centre churches to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion. The artist donated around £3,000, 40% of the sales of original artworks and prints which people bought because of this exhibition.
- **PhD research** into spaces where sexuality, gender, and faith co-exist creatively, which found that **'Queer sacred spaces provide an invaluable space that allows LGBTQIA+ Christians to just be, beyond reconciliation and "debate", and we should therefore be safeguarding these spaces.'** - Jones, P.N. (2024). *Queerly Beloved: Bridging Spaces of Christian Faith and LGBTQIA+ Identity through Creativity*. University of Leicester. Thesis.

[My trans 17-year-old] was asking me if it was church this evening
and made me look it up to confirm it was definitely next week.
It is the only place he really feels comfortable.

Financial review

Income and expenditure:

The charity's financial position improved significantly in 2024. **Total income increased by 48% to £64,907** (2023: £43,831):

- **Donations:** £15,678 (2023: £7,210)
- **Fundraising:** £11,234 (2023: £3,925)
- **Grants:** £31,277 (2023: £27,630)
- **Other income:** £6,718 (2023: £5,066)

Expenditure increased to £50,143 (2023: £43,559) in line with the charity's increased activity, resulting in **a healthy surplus of £14,764** (2023: £272).

Fundraising highlights:

By the end of 2024, OTN had received **£15,678 in donations, 117% more than in 2023**. This exceptional increase includes a donation of £7,891 from Gathering Voices, a collaboration of Christian organisations with which OTN worked in partnership since 2018. This donation is restricted, a balance of £796.56 is carried forward to 2025.

OTN took part in the **Big Give Christmas Challenge** from 3rd-10th December 2024. More than 50 donors contributed £5,050, matched by £2,500 in pledges from OTN supporters and £2,500 from The Together Fund, which supports Christian organisations making a positive impact. Gift Aid contributions made the final total **more than £11,000**.

‘We share music, laughter, thoughts, and tea and coffee,
I am so glad Open Table is here. What a wonderful thing it is.’

Reserves policy:

As approved by the Trustees on 5th April 2025, OTN aims to hold reserves equivalent to 3-6 months of core operational costs. This buffer will help to: manage short-term cash flow; cover emergency funding gaps; invest in strategic development, and wind down operations if necessary. At year-end 2024, unrestricted reserves stood at £15,619, an increase from £855 in 2023. This is equivalent to around four months projected operating expenditure, so we are now comfortably within our policy limits. This puts the charity in a stronger position to meet its policy target and respond to future opportunities and risks.

Risks

The Trustees have identified and addressed several key risks. The main risks and mitigations are as follows:

Financial sustainability: We have mitigated financial risk through diversifying income streams, securing multi-year funding, and building reserves to our target level of 3-6 months of operational costs.

Safeguarding: As an organisation created by and for LGBTQIA+ people who have often experienced harm in religious spaces, we are deeply committed to creating safe environments. In 2024 we appointed OTN Co-Chair Andrew Howorth and Director Kieran Bohan as our safeguarding leads and reviewed our policies to ensure they reflect best practice.

Reputation and quality: The Open Table name represents a quality mark that signifies genuine welcome and inclusion. Our Network Agreement (see following section), developed in 2024, will help ensure consistent standards across all communities while allowing for local flexibility and ownership.

'The Open Table Network has been a beacon of hope, helping me find an inclusive church after visiting eight different churches where I felt unwelcome. By creating a space of genuine acceptance and spiritual connection, they've not just offered a community - they've provided a lifeline of understanding and belonging.'

Structure, Governance and Management

OTN is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) governed by its constitution.

In 2024 we developed a Network Agreement to outline the relationship and commitment between OTN, local Open Table communities, and the churches which host them. It includes commitments to our shared vision, mission, values, and objectives, to ensure that OTN, and all our Open Table communities, are welcoming, supportive, accountable and safeguarded. We will consult our communities about this and implement it in 2025.

Trustees are recruited by nomination from within the membership and leadership of Open Table communities, and from stakeholders with whom we have worked in partnership.

All persons appointed or re-appointed as charity trustees shall be asked, on being invited to accept appointment, to indicate in writing whether they identify as Christian and whether they accept OTN's Statement of Faith. No appointment shall have effect if the person appointed does not accept the Statement of Faith. No appointment shall have effect if it would bring the proportion of charity trustees not identifying as Christian at the time of last appointment to greater than one-third.

The Statement of Faith, amended in 2024 to be more inclusive in line with our revised charitable object, can be read here: opentable.lgbt/our-faith-belief.

Reference and administrative details:

Trustees:

- Sarah Louise Hobbs (Co-Chair)
- Andrew John Howorth (Co-Chair from 12/03/24)
- Neil Gordon Rees (Secretary)
- Andrew (Roo) George Stewart
- Revd Calum Crombie (from 12/03/24)
- Dr Carol Joyner (from 12/03/24)
- Revd Jayne Taylor (from 12/03/24)
- Revd Rosemary Elizabeth Hill
- Revd Yin-An Chen (from 12/03/24).

Former trustees who served during the year:

- Revd Dr Alex Scott Clare-Young (Co-Chair until 12/03/24)
- Revd Anne Yvonne Bennett (until 12/03/24)
- Mr Liam Greenbank (until 12/03/24)
- Mr Peter Nicholas Jones (until 05/01/2025)

Staff: The Director of Open Table Network is Kieran Bohan. During the year he worked full-time hours until September, when he began training for Methodist ministry. He now works 0.6 FTE and is the charity's sole employee.

Advisors:

- Jeff Prescott supported the charity as Treasurer. Jeff has stepped down at the end of the 2024 and we extend our generous thanks for his commitment to OTN.
- Sarah Jones has since March 2024, provided paid support with fundraising and pro bono support with governance and management.

Contact details:

Registered Address: c/o URC Mersey Synod Office, 1 Fingall Road, Liverpool L15 9JE.

Email: network@opentable.lgbt

Mobile: 07501 753 618

Website: www.opentable.lgbt

Social Media: @opentablelgbt

(Facebook / Instagram / Bluesky)

LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/opentablelgbt

YouTube: youtube.com/opentablenetwork

Declarations:

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees:

Signature(s):



Full name(s):

Sarah Hobbs

Neil Rees

Position:

Co-Chair

Secretary

Date:

05/04/2025

OPEN TABLE NETWORK**SUMMARY RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNTS 2024**

	<u>Year ending 31/12/2024</u>		<u>Year ending 31/12/2023</u>	
Receipts	£	£	£	£
Donations		15,678		11,135
Fundraising		11,234		
Grants		31,277		27,630
Other		6,718		5,066
Total		<u>64,907</u>		<u>43,831</u>
Payments				
Charitable expenditure	<u>50,143</u>		<u>43,559</u>	
		50,143		43,559
Surplus / Deficit		<u>14,764</u>		<u>272</u>
Reserves brought forward		855		583
Reserves carried forward		<u>15,619</u>		<u>855</u>

The notes to these accounts form a part of them and include detailed receipts and payments
 Restricted and unrestricted funds are disclosed in Note 3, Details Receipts and Payments Accounts
 All operations are classed as ongoing operations.

OPEN TABLE NETWORK STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES**As at 31 December 2024**

	£
Assets:	
Cash at Co-Op Bank	<u>15,619.13</u>
Represented by :	
General Fund (unrestricted)	14,822.57
Restricted Fund	<u>796.56</u>
Total	<u>15,619.13</u>

TRUSTEES RESPONSIBILITIES IN RELATION TO FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Charity Law requires the Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which comply with the regulations set out in the Charities Act 2011. The Trustees have elected to take advantage of the provisions that apply to small charities and have prepared a Receipts and Payments Account and Statement of Assets and Liabilities which are set out above

Approved by the trustees on 5 April 2025.

Signed on their behalf by:



Sarah Hobbs
Co-Chair

- 1 ACCOUNTING POLICIES
The accounts have been prepared under the "Receipts and Payments" basis as prescribed by the Charity Commission.
There has been no change to the methods of accounting since last year.
- 2 PAYMENTS TO TRUSTEES
No trustees received remuneration, or payment for goods or services during the year
- 3 DETAILED RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNTS
See next page
- 4 RESTRICTED FUNDS
OTN received a restricted grant in year from Gathering Voices of £7,531.50. A balance of £796.56 was unspent at the year end
- 5 INTEREST FREE LOAN FROM A TRUSTEE
Both receipts and payments include £5,350, being the total of three interest loans received and repaid in year to assist with managing cash flow.

OPEN TABLE NETWORK**Note 3****DETAILED RECEIPTS & PAYMENT ACCOUNTS 2024**

	Total
Reserves brought forward	855
Receipts	
Donations	15,678
Fundraising	11,234
Grants	31,277
Short Term Interest Free Loan	5,350
Other	1,368
Total	<u>64,907</u>
Payments	
Dev Work	32,822
Travel	2,127
Office Rent	809
Postage	64
Training	2,691
Events	211
Phone / IT related	1,081
Consultants	4,500
Short Term Interest Free Loan	5,350
Other	488
Total	<u>50,143</u>
Surplus / Deficit	14,764
Reserves carried forward	<u>15,619</u>

**INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S REPORT, TO THE TRUSTEES OF OPEN TABLE NETWORK,
(CHARITY REGISTRATION NUMBER 1193868)**

I report on the accounts of the charity for the year ended 31 December, 2024 which are set out on pages 1 to 4

Respective responsibilities of trustees and examiner

The charity's trustees are responsible for the preparation of the accounts. The charity's trustees consider that an audit is not required for this year under section 144 of the Charities Act 2011 (the Charities Act) and that an independent examination is needed.

It is my responsibility to:

examine the accounts under section 145 of the Charities Act;

to follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the Charities Act;

and to state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of independent examiner's report

My examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters.

The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair view' and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

Independent examiner's statement

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention:

(1) which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements: to keep accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the Charities Act; and to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and comply with the accounting requirements of the Charities Act have not been met; or

(2) to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

K CROOPER

29 March 2025