



Soul Sisters: Empowering People Annual Report

The trustees present their report with the financial statements of the charity for the year ended 29 March 2023. The trustees have adopted the provisions of Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS102) (effective 1 January 2019).

Soul Sisters: Empowering People is a CIO with registered charity number 1194597 established in Rochdale, Lancashire.

The organisation has developed a Foundation Model Constitution, whose only voting members are our charity trustees.

As stated in our Constitution, the object of the CIO, to be carried out for the public benefit in Lancashire, is: to relieve the needs of and support those at risk of, or suffering the effects of, domestic violence/domestic abuse (to include sexual, physical, emotional and economic abuse) and their children, particularly but not exclusively through the provision of one-to-one sessions, peer support, group sessions, mentoring, advocacy and signposting services.

Our Activities:

- Soul Sisters: Empowering People works primarily within the borough of Rochdale, providing support to women, men and their families.
- Our support is accessed both online and in-person through peer support groups, creative classes, skills workshops, book clubs, meditation and self-care sessions, walking groups, mentoring and one-to-one support.
- We have a small team of volunteers who run online sessions and provide support to both beneficiaries and the charity's trustees.
- Our advocacy team provide beneficiaries with the knowledge and skills needed when seeking external professional help - from solicitors or paralegals, for example, as well as relevant guidance and assistance for court attendance and legal processes.
- We signpost to external organisations who can provide specialist support not offered by our team.
- We share information about our services via word of mouth, local authorities, community partnerships, local news stories, our website, social media, podcasts, and our mailing list.



Public Benefit:

The trustees confirm that they have referred to the advice contained in the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the charity's aims and objectives, and in planning future activities. In particular, the trustees have considered how planned activities will contribute to the aims and objectives they have set.

Our Governance:

At the time of the charity's registration, Soul Sisters had four founding trustees, we appointed two more during our first year and now operate with five, following the resignation of Jo Baldwin in October 2023. Trustees have joined us through established connections with other charitable organisations, volunteering or skills-sharing with other trustees and volunteers, or applying directly to the charity's founder Asma Begum (Chair).

Existing trustees consider the skills, knowledge and experience offered by applicants alongside the organisation's requirements, and vote to accept new board members at monthly board meetings held either online or in person. As per our Constitution, the only people eligible to be the charity's board members are its trustees, who are appointed for an initial term of three years.

We have created a **strong, experienced, female-led team** with key skills amongst our trustees and volunteers including organisational strategy and compliance, charity governance, administration, coaching, mentoring and community organisation. We have several male volunteers who offer their expertise and experience directly to male service users. Our current all-female board is considering recruiting male trustees.

Several of our trustees have experience working within charitable organisations, and some hold trustee roles at other charities. Their governance skills and guidance have been invaluable in leading the charity during its first two years.

We have two patrons who are public advocates for supporting those who have suffered domestic abuse, both of whom have personal experience. Located in the South of England and Ireland, our patrons assist in promoting and hosting key events for our charity.



Key Legal and Administrative Information:

Charity name: Soul Sisters: Empowering People

Registered charity number: 1194597

Charity's principal address: Unit 37367
PO Box 4336
Manchester
M61 0BW

Trustees:

Asma Begum - Chair	(appointed 01/01/2020)
Lisa Birtles - Vice Chair	(appointed 01/01/2021)
Emma Cottam - Treasurer	(appointed 01/08/2020)
Marie Flaherty - Secretary	(appointed 01/01/2021)
Christine Aspin	(appointed 01/04/2021)
Jo Baldwin	(appointed 01/04/2021, resigned 03/10/2023)

Patrons: Luzia Antonio
Jo Baldwin



Our Foundation:

Soul Sisters became a Registered Charity in May 2021, after operating as a community group since the start of 2020. The organisation was founded by Asma Begum, herself a survivor, with her own lived experience of domestic abuse. Asma had begun to publicly share her own story through “Truth to Power Cafe” events held around the country. The positive response led to her creation of a support group for other women like herself. Women who were looking for help, to make new connections, develop female friendships, rebuild self-confidence, reach out to others for support, deal with legal advice, family courts, obtain financial advice and support, and more.

In December 2020, Asma and her Soul Sisters story was featured in a local news article - www.rochdaleonline.co.uk/news-features/2/news-headlines/137946/domestic-abuse-support-group-worked-through-lockdown-to-empower-women

Asma and her work for the charity has continued to receive recognition. Asma was invited to write the foreword for the publication ‘Women Leading in our New World’ (Proper Books, 2022) which supports the charity, and she has also appeared at multiple speaking and networking events to share her story and raise awareness of Soul Sisters: Empowering People.

Our Vision: Life Without Fear

Our Values:

- **Trust** - we ensure our Soul Sisters community feel safe and know they are in a place of trust.
- **Respect** - we encourage the Soul Sisters community to respect and appreciate each other’s qualities, feelings, wishes and rights without judgement.
- **Inclusion** - we welcome and support everyone who needs us. Our diverse team is representative of the community we serve.
- **Compassion** - we care deeply about our community, we listen with care and treat everyone with kindness and dignity.
- **Empowerment** - we enable our community to step into their personal power, live/work without fear and actively support each other.



Our Strategic Pillars:

We empower people affected by Domestic Abuse to Live Without Fear.

We do this by:

- **Providing Support & Empowerment**
- **Providing Domestic Violence Awareness and Education**
- **Creating Positive Policy & Legislative Change**
- **Fundraising**

Executive Summary

In this report, we have summarised some of our **key achievements** and highlights during our second year as a registered charity. During this year, we continued to build upon our efforts of year one, further growing our service offering and running our in-person events in Rochdale and surrounding boroughs, whilst maintaining the online community we have built, which connects people all over the UK and beyond. We held an **online conference** with invited speakers to celebrate International Women's Day, and started the process of relocating to new premises whilst staying in the heart of Rochdale. We launched our first crowdfunding campaign on GoFundMe, kick-starting our work with both new and existing partners to develop an exciting **arts project**. The project was shared with audiences in the summer of 2023, featuring contributions from a group of women which include beneficiaries of Soul Sisters: Empowering People, some of whom have never performed in front of an audience before.

We have **supported almost three hundred people** since we began our journey, providing them with advice, support, advocacy and mentoring, in addition to giving them the tools to thrive; boosting self-confidence, highlighting the benefits of self-care and friendship, being part of a like-minded community; and feeling understood, listened to, believed and supported, in a safe space, without judgement.

Over the next year, we will continue to support our existing community with our regular sessions (support groups, mentoring, creative groups and wellbeing events), and we aim to build upon our relationships with local organisations and community networks. We aim to recruit volunteers and give them the training and skills they will need to provide effective support for our beneficiaries. We will also continue to develop our strategy for the next year, 5 years and beyond, expanding work already done on our key strategic pillars and ways to achieve our goals. We aim to appoint men to our organisational roles and hope to expand our services to male beneficiaries.



Soul Sisters: Empowering People Achievements in 2022-23

1. Funded Projects

Digital Skills & Employability Programme (April 2022 to Date)

Overview:

The Digital Skills Programme, initiated in collaboration with Good Things Foundation and commenced in April 2022, aimed to bridge the digital divide and empower individuals in Rochdale and Middleton. Originally intended as a fully-funded one-off project which concluded in September 2022, it evolved into an ongoing job club to provide continued support to participants.

Locations and Participants:

Operating in Rochdale and Middleton, we engaged individuals spanning community settings to formal adult skills sectors. Target beneficiaries included the long-term unemployed, those impacted by COVID-19, economically inactive individuals, and those in low-paid or insecure employment. With funding from the Good Things Foundation, we successfully supported **forty participants**.

Engagement and Empowerment:

Majority participation occurred in Middleton, facilitated at the Demesne Community Centre, fostering trust through workshops. This expansion aimed to break generational beliefs hindering employment and education. The programme empowered participants, many of whom had never used digital gadgets, providing them with a renewed sense of self and purpose.

Success Stories:

The programme's impact is exemplified by a participant overcoming domestic abuse, achieving academic success, and securing support for childcare and education. Additionally, three participants transitioned to volunteering, creating a supportive community. Two individuals secured desired jobs, and numerous participants enhanced their skills and created or updated their CVs.

Feedback from Course Participants:

"Tutors on the course were supportive and were always there when I needed help. Completing the course has given me a lot of confidence. I felt proud of myself when I received my certificate."

"I got along well with other students in the class, and the atmosphere was pleasant. The centre where the course was held is only 5 minutes from my home, making it very convenient. I recommended this course and other classes at the centre to other people, friends, and family."



Curriculum and Learning Platforms:

Utilising the Online Centres Network, participants accessed Learn My Way, completing modules on digital literacy, online safety, job searching, and more. The provision of tablets and data incentivised completion, and ongoing support included CV assistance and skill-building in areas like Google Drive and Gmail.

Addressing Barriers:

Barriers, such as language differences, were overcome using tools like Google Translation. Travel expenses were identified as a significant challenge, leading to an allocation of funding for transportation, ensuring wider participation and reducing isolation.

Continued Impact and Future Plans:

Out of 40 participants, 35 have completed the course. The job club, in collaboration with Rochdale Hopwood Hall College and the local Job Centre, continues to thrive. Ongoing efforts involve community outreach through banners, posters, and events, reinforcing our commitment to fostering digital skills, employability, and community engagement. This report reflects not just the culmination of a programme but a testament to the transformative impact on individuals and communities. We remain dedicated to our mission, ensuring continued support and opportunities for those we serve.

Culturally Appropriate Mental Health - GMCVO (2022-2023)

Soul Sisters secured funding from GMCVO which allowed us to host a series of online sessions catered to the South Asian community, conducted in Punjabi and Urdu by a qualified doctor. These sessions covered crucial topics on mental health, with a focus on severe conditions. We aimed to proactively raise awareness within communities that often seek help only at crisis points, encouraging early access to mental health support.

We delved into subjects like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and PTSD during these informative events. Tailoring our approach, we conducted separate workshops for both women's and men's peer support groups, addressing specific concerns. Additionally, we recorded episodes for our Soul Sisters podcast, giving us another opportunity to disseminate valuable information outside of these sessions and our peer groups.

Our commitment to mental health awareness stems from the understanding that individuals who have experienced abuse often grapple with significant mental health challenges. By shedding light on these issues, we hope to encourage timely intervention and support for those in need.

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Empowering Women Through Storytelling Initiative podcast in collaboration with Action Together - Stories of Strength (2022-2023)

In line with our commitment to supporting women in the borough, we are excited to be part of the **Empowering Women Through Storytelling** Initiative. This initiative seeks to collect and amplify the diverse narratives of women who have faced abuse, trauma, and life challenges, while also highlighting stories of resilience, empowerment, and personal growth.

Project Overview:

Our primary objective was to create a platform where women shared their experiences in a safe and supportive environment. We believe that storytelling serves as a powerful form of therapy, contributing to both mental and physical well-being while addressing feelings of loneliness. By sharing their stories, women can not only feel heard but also provide valuable insights that may empower and resonate with others facing similar challenges. The project was created by the Women's Services Network supported by Action Together, and episodes in the series were produced together with partners from across Rochdale including Cartwheel Arts, Soul Sisters: Empowering People, Ukeff, Rochdale Mind, Rochdale Women's Welfare Association, Rochdale Connection Trust and Rochdale Health Alliance.

Diverse Perspectives:

To ensure comprehensive representation, we interviewed women from various backgrounds, faiths, and walks of life. Language diversity is encouraged, allowing women to express themselves in their preferred language.

Anonymity and Privacy:

Recognising the sensitivity of the topics discussed, we emphasised that women had the option to remain anonymous if they preferred not to share their stories publicly. Respecting their privacy was of utmost importance in creating a safe space for open and honest conversations.

Showcasing Progress and Success:

In addition to sharing stories of challenges, we aspired to highlight the achievements and progress made by women in various roles such as entrepreneurs, business owners, activists, and mothers. The initiative shed light on the diverse paths women have taken to carve out success and positive change in their lives.

We express our gratitude to the women who courageously share their stories and contribute to the strength of our community, and **Action Together** for funding this through the Women's Services Network. This initiative aligns with our mission to empower and uplift women in the borough.

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Chorus of Power Stage Production (2023)

Exciting developments have unfolded with our Chorus of Power stage production. Securing funding from the Arts Council, in collaboration with Bolton Octagon Theatre, HOME in Manchester, the Royal Exchange Theatre, and Touchstones in Rochdale, our project gained momentum. Workshops, initiated from February to March, saw the project's director actively engaging with participants. Themed around domestic abuse activism, these sessions fostered trust and creativity.

The GoFundMe campaign commenced in January 2023 and raised over £800 towards the Chorus of Power project.

Funding Utilisation:

Utilising Arts Council and Forever Manchester funding, we ensured the well-being of our participants. From March 2023, we provided lunch and travel support for up to 20 engaged individuals. A diverse range of workshops, including calligraphy and cross-stitching, formed part of our preparations for the main production. As we head towards the May 2023 showcase, the project has garnered considerable interest, with Asma, our founder, actively promoting it across various borough groups.

2. Continuing Support and Organisational Changes

Collaborative Creative Arts Project: 16 Days of Activism (25th Nov 2022 - 10th Dec 2022)

Project Overview:

The collaborative arts project between Soul Sisters: Empowering People and Street Style Surgery has been a testament to the power of creativity in empowering women. This venture emerged as a result of our engagement with Flourish Together CIC, bringing together the unique strengths and experiences of Sissy Rooney, Founder of Street Style Surgery, and Asma Begum, Founder of Soul Sisters: Empowering People.

Project Details:

Sissy Rooney, working with Soul Sisters' regular Monday Creative Ladies group, embarked on a journey to inspire participants to create mixed-media self-portraits for 16 Days of Activism. The project utilised a variety of art materials, fostering exploration and expression. The ladies delved into different mediums, incorporating powerful statements like 'Strong Woman' or 'Freedom' into their artworks.

Project Goals and Achievements:

Asma highlighted that the women involved, many of whom have experienced domestic abuse, often struggle with low confidence and self-esteem. The project aimed to empower these women, encouraging self-reflection and the celebration of inner strength. The creation

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of mixed-media self-portraits became a transformative experience, with participants gaining confidence and a positive outlook on themselves.

Collaboration Origins:

The collaboration between Soul Sisters and Street Style Surgery was made possible through Flourish Together CIC, based in Greater Manchester. The networking opportunities provided by Flourish allowed Sissy and Asma to connect, share their work, and discover common goals. Sissy, with a personal history of domestic abuse, and Asma, working in the field, found common ground and a shared passion for giving back to women facing similar challenges.

Highlights and Challenges:

The project has seen numerous highs, including the enthusiastic participation of new women joining the initiative. The sense of pride and accomplishment observed in the participants as they create their artwork has been a source of joy for both Sissy and Asma. The socialisation and camaraderie among the women during the creative process have contributed to the overall mental wellness of the group. Asma expressed amazement at the diverse approaches each woman took in creating their self-portraits, emphasising the positive impact on self-perception and communication within the group.

Benefits of Collaboration:

This collaboration has proven to be mutually beneficial. For Soul Sisters, it provided an avenue for participants to discover their capabilities and enjoy a creative outlet. Asma appreciated the shared creativity and the expertise that Sissy brought to the project. The friendship developed between the two organisations has fostered a supportive environment.

Role of Flourish Together CIC

Both Sissy and Asma acknowledged the pivotal role Flourish played in bringing them together. Flourish provided a platform for networking, access to workshops on funding and budgeting, and a supportive community. The collaborative project was made possible through the opportunities and connections facilitated by Flourish, and we extend our gratitude to them for creating an environment where such impactful collaborations happened. Flourish shared a blog post about this project on their website as part of the Women Changemaker Spotlight series:

<https://flourishtogether.org.uk/women-changemaker-spotlight-series-asma-begum-sissy-rooney/>

Support Groups

Throughout the year, we continued to run our regular **Ladies Creative Sessions** on Mondays, at either Touchstones or our base at the Better Together Building. During some of the sessions, our facilitators led a themed discussion to encourage everyone to open up and share their thoughts and feelings with others, building trust and honesty amongst the participants.

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Some of the art and craft techniques included:

Creating and decorating a Faberge-style egg; an Introduction to Photography; Macrame and cross stitch while discussing self-confidence; Decorating Glass bottles while talking about Mental Health; Creating Pom Poms discussing Friendship; Planting Flower Bulbs - to celebrate Earth Day; Jewellery Making; Calligraphy and card-making.

Our online **Peer Support Groups** also continued, with a separate group held each week for **Soul Sisters** (female-identifying participants) and **Soul Brothers** (male-identifying participants), with themed discussions led by our facilitators. Some discussion topics included: "Explain why you are worthy of love and deserve happiness"; "What does a purposeful and meaningful life look like?"; Friendship; "What are the characteristics of an Abuser?"; Overcoming Loneliness; "When is gratitude important?" and more issue-specific topics such as discussions of Family Courts.

We also ran a series of Peer Group sessions on **Health** topics, for which we had a guest speaker: Healthy Heart with Dr Shakoor; Healthy Diet with Dr Shakoor; World Heart Day; and 5 Ways of Wellbeing with Dr Shakoor.

Another of our regular sessions over the past year was our **Online Book Club**, run by two volunteers every Monday evening on Zoom. These had five regular female attendees, together reading and discussing the books "Happy for No Reason: 7 Steps to Being Happy from the Inside Out" and "Secrets of Divine Love: A Spiritual Journey into the Heart of Islam".

Free For All, Touchstones Rochdale, Summer 2022

As part of our regular engagement with **Touchstones**, we successfully proposed and organised two events during their "Free For All" summer programme in August 2022 - The Human Library, and Group Coaching Sessions.

Human Library Event

We advertised the opportunity across our social media and during our group sessions to take part in a Human Library event. Six people volunteered to be 'human books' - every person has a story; they shared their stories of diversity and hardship openly and honestly with others.

Group Coaching

We successfully proposed running a series of group coaching sessions entitled: Overcoming Limiting Beliefs.

These sessions encompassed various themes, including achieving life balance, rediscovering self-worth by challenging limiting beliefs and fears and embracing the power of journaling. We also introduced a session on cultivating gratitude to fill hearts with positivity. Each session accommodated up to 10 participants. Our aim was clear – to motivate,

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empower, rebuild confidence, and help individuals find their true identity. This initiative served as another avenue to connect with the Rochdale Borough community, acknowledging the importance of well-being practices that resonate with many.

Family Courts

During the year, we have continued to support both men and women going through family courts; providing advice, helping them to collate evidence, reviewing and explaining court documentation and connecting our beneficiaries with other organisations to obtain specialist support. We have helped people understand their rights in court, shown them how to obtain legal aid, advocated for them with external organisations, and empowered them to request additional support (including interpreters for people whose first language is not English), giving them the knowledge and confidence to speak up in court.

Raising Awareness

We have made efforts to improve our online marketing and communications strategy, including monitoring and analysis of user engagement to determine the most effective methods of communication.

We continued to send out our **newsletter** to almost 100 subscribers, sharing achievements and charity news/updates, introducing members of the Trustees and Volunteers teams, as well as informing our readers on the different forms of abuse that exist, in addition to a smaller, semi-regular feature offering self-care tips.

Through our mailing list, we highlighted the work of our **Soul Brothers** peer support group by sharing the story of one of our group's beneficiaries in the June 2022 newsletter:

"One of our volunteers recently interviewed a male survivor, **B** (who wished to remain anonymous), to hear his story of coming to us for support.

B initially contacted Asma after a friend shared a link on social media. He said, "I think with [Soul Sisters] **I feel like they can relate to me** more. I called other places, they [were] okay but... It's like talking to someone that hasn't been in my shoes. Obviously they listened to me, like, 'OK, *how are you today?*' and I just talked to them for half an hour and then felt like - it's not going anywhere."

He later joined Soul Brothers, our online peer support group, and was able to speak to people who could identify with his experiences. "When I [told] my story already someone was like 'Yeah, *your story is kind of similar to mine, I've been there, I felt this way,*' I felt that I was ok. **Someone related to how I feel**, they probably understand where [I am] coming from. So yeah, it's been really helpful."

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[In the group sessions] we are talking, sharing opinions and lifting each other up, saying: *'It's gonna be okay. It's not forever. I have been there.'*“

We grew our following and improved engagement across our **social media** channels: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. We also curated and developed our community through networking and resharing others' content, supporting local community organisations / CIOs / CICs by boosting their visibility to our audience. During 2022-23 we saw over a **250% increase** in engagement on Instagram and a **300% increase** in our reach on Facebook compared to 2021-22. On **Instagram**, Soul Sisters became an **Answer Cancer** Champion, raising awareness of the organisation's campaign, sharing information on cervical cancer and encouraging our followers (the majority of whom identify as female) to book and attend regular cervical screenings.

We have doubled our **Twitter** account followers, reaching over 200 by March 2023. We increased engagement on our posts by creating content and amplifying other organisations during awareness days such as *International Women's Day*, *World Values Day* and *White Ribbon Day*, in addition to UN's *16 Days of Activism* and *Volunteers Week*. We continued to expand our network of contacts with other organisations offering parallel or specialist services.

We are aware of the benefit of operating private online spaces and encrypted messaging services to protect our beneficiaries, and have maintained our **safe online spaces**, each with volunteers in admin roles to moderate content and members as necessary, to maintain trust and ensure users' safety. Our volunteers have received safeguarding training to ensure they can identify and report any concerns to our safeguarding lead.

In our safe spaces on **Facebook** and **WhatsApp**, members can ask for advice or support from Soul Sisters volunteers, or reach out for support, empathy and friendship from their peers. Our team will also share useful information including upcoming events/support group sessions, local community events or signpost to external organisations providing support. We also use the **Nextdoor** app to share information about our upcoming sessions and peer support groups, which is an easy and free way to promote our sessions locally. Local radio stations have also shared information on our behalf to the local community, particularly reaching out to Bengali and Urdu-speaking communities via Asma Begum presenting dedicated programming, or appearing as a guest to raise awareness of domestic abuse and the work of Soul Sisters: Empowering People.

To strengthen our presence and foster deeper connections within Rochdale Borough, we also raised awareness of the charity and connected with local communities at pop-ups and events. We were invited to hold a pop-up stand at **Middleton Shopping Centre** for several days, and at the **Middleton Money Max Roadshow** during the summer of 2022. It was great for Asma and members of the Soul Sisters team to meet the Middleton community, and we had some great conversations about the support available locally (or in some cases, the

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lack of it). Some visitors to our stand were also keen to share their stories and experiences as family/friends of victims or as survivors themselves. We were approached by people of all ages, genders and cultures.

Trustee Emma spent a day helping out and shared her feedback for the newsletter: *"It was amazing to hear so many people's stories, but also saddening to hear how many people had been affected by domestic abuse"*. Volunteers on the stand handed out leaflets for the Soul Sisters coffee mornings at local venues Lighthouse Project and Demesne Community Centre, as well as the Ladies Creative Sessions held in Rochdale. We encouraged people to join our mailing list and to sign up for the free Digital Skills and Employability training courses we were running nearby.

We were also invited to take part in the **Summer Table Top Sale at Demesne Community Centre**, where we not only raised awareness about domestic abuse but were also able to carry out fundraising activities. During the event, we were honoured to meet **Rochdale Councillor Neil Emmott** and used the opportunity to discuss our impactful work. We engaged with the event's attendees, emphasising the importance of self-care and promoting the practice of journaling. It was a rewarding experience that allowed us to connect, share, and advocate for crucial aspects of wellbeing.

New Book Released - July 2022

During 2022 we were thrilled to announce a remarkable achievement – Soul Sisters: Empowering People has been prominently featured in the inspiring book, "Women Leading in Our New World." Edited by our esteemed patron and former trustee, Jo Baldwin, this book showcases insights from nine authors, including our founder, Asma Begum.

What makes this even more special is that a percentage of the book's sales will be directed towards supporting Soul Sisters Empowering People. We're grateful for this opportunity and excited about the positive impact it will have on our mission.

Soul Sisters Office / Meeting Space

After setting up our office in the Better Together Building in Rochdale's town centre, we were proud to celebrate our new home by holding an official opening event in the summer of 2022, with guests including local councillors - some of whom have supported the charity since its inception in 2020 - in addition to our board of trustees, volunteers, family and friends. We shared the story and photos with local news organisation Rochdale Online - <https://www.rochdaleonline.co.uk/news-features/2/news-headlines/147649/soul-sisters-celebrates-office-opening-in-rochdale>

However, in a surprising turn of events, our tenure at the Better Together building in Rochdale ended abruptly in February 2023. This was due to the need for emergency building works to be carried out, following a spell of unusually cold and stormy weather

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conditions, which caused severe damage to the building's fabric. Luckily, we received support from Demesne Community Centre and a local small business, which both temporarily housed our office equipment and resources, while we looked for alternative accommodation. Towards the end of March 2023, we began discussions with the trustees of Champness Hall about office space available within their building, which is located conveniently on Drake Street in the town centre. This new space promises ease of access, and could provide us with a secure and dedicated working environment, with better access to utilities, and the opportunity to facilitate more workshops throughout the week.

Virtual Events and Conferences

During the **16 Days of Activism campaign** (Nov-Dec 2022), Soul Sisters held an open-to-all Virtual Event jointly hosted by Asma Begum and Jo Baldwin on our Facebook page - discussing some amazing, inspiring women. They put out a Call to Action to everyone who attended the event - "What will you pledge to protect women and girls against violence?".

To celebrate International Women's Day, we held "**Life Without Fear - a Virtual Conference by Soul Sisters: Empowering People**", on Zoom, an event to empower people affected by domestic violence to "live without fear", to educate, inspire, share stories and raise awareness. This was a free but ticketed event, offering attendees the option to donate funds to the charity. The participants donated their time at no cost to the charity, and we raised £35 in donations. The virtual conference was recorded, with plans to share it at a later date via our YouTube channel. The following sessions were held during the conference:

Talk - What is Domestic Violence? with Jo Baldwin, Soul Guide and Mentor

Talk: The Yellow Brick Road to Success with Keynote Speaker: Alexandra Worsley - The Courage Coach.

Workshop - Values & Personal Vision with Lisa Birtles, The Resourceful Leader.

Feedback from attendees was very positive both during and after the event. Our aim is to hold an annual Soul Sisters Conference, with plans to hold it in person, supported by, and with sponsorships from local organisations, and with invited speakers and guests.

This Annual Report reflects our resilience in navigating unexpected changes, securing new office space, and progressing successfully with our impactful Chorus of Power stage production. The continued support of our community and funding partners propels us even further, as we look forward to a transformative year ahead.



Financial Review

Financial Position

The financial position of the charity as at 29 March 2023 was showing:

	£
Unrestricted funds	(269)
Restricted funds	10,751
Total funds	<u>10,482</u>

At 29 March 2023, the charity had negative free reserves of £269 when accounting for creditors falling due within one year of £810, this is covered by monies received after the year end. Please see the Reserves Policy note below.

Reserves Policy

Soul Sisters: Empowering People is actively looking to rebuild unrestricted reserves to meet the charity's day-to-day financial obligations outside of the project work covered by restricted funding. We have been applying for funding to cover our running costs from larger organisations, including a successful bid for £10,000 of operating funds from the National Lottery's Awards for All scheme which was received. We aim to build up a buffer to cover up to six months of running costs, to ensure long-term stability for the organisation and enable us to make plans for 2024 and beyond.

As a charity which is still in its relative infancy, we rely on public donations to keep going, as well as the generous time and efforts freely given by our team of trustees and volunteers. Soul Sisters: Empowering People does not employ any staff and is supported by other local charities and CICs which provide free, discounted or in-kind support, enabling us to continue to support people who need our services, despite the challenging financial situation we have found ourselves in during 2023 - an experience which has unfortunately become common among many small charities like ours.

Declaration

This report has been approved by the board of trustees and signed on their behalf.

A Begum

Asma Begum (Chair)

Date: 29/01/2024

SOUL SISTERS: EMPOWERING PEOPLE

**STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 29 MARCH 2023**

				Year Ended 29.3.23	Period 26.5.21 to 29.3.22
	Notes	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £	Total funds £
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM					
Donations and legacies		1,936	13,260	15,196	8,004
Other income		<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>21</u>
Total		<u>1,936</u>	<u>13,260</u>	<u>15,196</u>	<u>8,025</u>
 EXPENDITURE ON					
Charitable activities					
Charitable		<u>3,059</u>	<u>6,336</u>	<u>9,395</u>	<u>3,344</u>
 NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)					
Transfers between funds	5	(1,123)	6,924	5,801	4,681
		<u>(306)</u>	<u>306</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Net movement in funds		(1,429)	7,230	5,801	4,681
 RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS					
Total funds brought forward		1,160	3,521	4,681	-
		<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD		<u>(269)</u>	<u>10,751</u>	<u>10,482</u>	<u>4,681</u>

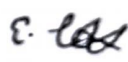
The notes form part of these financial statements

SOUL SISTERS: EMPOWERING PEOPLE

**BALANCE SHEET
29 MARCH 2023**

	Notes	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	2023 Total funds £	2022 Total funds £
CURRENT ASSETS					
Cash at bank		541	10,751	11,292	4,681
CREDITORS					
Amounts falling due within one year	4	(810)	-	(810)	-
NET CURRENT ASSETS/(LIABILITIES)		<u>(269)</u>	<u>10,751</u>	<u>10,482</u>	<u>4,681</u>
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>(269)</u>	<u>10,751</u>	<u>10,482</u>	<u>4,681</u>
NET ASSETS		<u>(269)</u>	<u>10,751</u>	<u>10,482</u>	<u>4,681</u>
FUNDS	5				
Unrestricted funds				(269)	1,160
Restricted funds				<u>10,751</u>	<u>3,521</u>
TOTAL FUNDS				<u>10,482</u>	<u>4,681</u>

The financial statements were approved by the Board of Trustees and authorised for issue on 29 Jan 2024 and were signed on its behalf by:



 Trustee
 Emma Cottam (Jan 29, 2024, 5:26pm)

SOUL SISTERS: EMPOWERING PEOPLE

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 29 MARCH 2023

1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

Basis of preparing the financial statements

The financial statements of the charity, which is a public benefit entity under FRS 102, have been prepared in accordance with the Charities SORP (FRS 102) 'Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (effective 1 January 2019)', Financial Reporting Standard 102 'The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland' and the Charities Act 2011. The financial statements have been prepared under the historical cost convention.

Income

All income is recognised in the Statement of Financial Activities once the charity has entitlement to the funds, it is probable that the income will be received and the amount can be measured reliably.

Expenditure

Liabilities are recognised as expenditure as soon as there is a legal or constructive obligation committing the charity to that expenditure, it is probable that a transfer of economic benefits will be required in settlement and the amount of the obligation can be measured reliably. Expenditure is accounted for on an accruals basis and has been classified under headings that aggregate all cost related to the category. Where costs cannot be directly attributed to particular headings they have been allocated to activities on a basis consistent with the use of resources.

Grants offered subject to conditions which have not been met at the year end date are noted as a commitment but not accrued as expenditure.

Taxation

The charity is exempt from tax on its charitable activities.

Fund accounting

Unrestricted funds can be used in accordance with the charitable objectives at the discretion of the trustees.

Restricted funds can only be used for particular restricted purposes within the objects of the charity. Restrictions arise when specified by the donor or when funds are raised for particular restricted purposes.

Further explanation of the nature and purpose of each fund is included in the notes to the financial statements.

2. TRUSTEES' REMUNERATION AND BENEFITS

There were no trustees' remuneration or other benefits for the year ended 29 March 2023 nor for the period ended 29 March 2022.

Trustees' expenses

One trustee received £1,007 as a project facilitator fee in the year for services other than as a trustee, this was later donated to the charity. There were £719 of trustees' reimbursed expenses paid for the year ended 29 March 2023 to three trustees for office supplies, training and travel (£272 - 2022).

3. COMPARATIVES FOR THE STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS FROM			
Donations and legacies	3,549	4,455	8,004
Other income	<u>21</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>21</u>
Total	<u>3,570</u>	<u>4,455</u>	<u>8,025</u>
EXPENDITURE ON			
Charitable activities			
Charitable	<u>2,410</u>	<u>934</u>	<u>3,344</u>
NET INCOME	1,160	3,521	4,681

SOUL SISTERS: EMPOWERING PEOPLE

**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS - continued
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 29 MARCH 2023**

3. COMPARATIVES FOR THE STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES - continued

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD	<u>1,160</u>	<u>3,521</u>	<u>4,681</u>

4. CREDITORS: AMOUNTS FALLING DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR

	2023 £	2022 £
Other creditors	<u>810</u>	<u>-</u>

5. MOVEMENT IN FUNDS

	At 30.3.22 £	Net movement in funds £	Transfers between funds £	At 29.3.23 £
Unrestricted funds				
General fund	1,160	(1,123)	(306)	(269)
Restricted funds				
Action Together - 100 Stories of Strength Podcast	877	(185)	-	692
The Good Things Foundation - Digital Skills Funding	2,300	(2,606)	306	-
Keep It Safe Training	100	-	-	100
Near Neighbour	241	(192)	-	49
MIND Seed Funds	3	-	-	3
Action Together Volunteers Celebration Grant	-	466	-	466
Chorus of Power - Autotrader Foundation	-	828	-	828
GMCVO - Culturally Appropriate Mental Health Fund	-	6,410	-	6,410
GM Perinatal/PIMH Peer support	-	1,000	-	1,000
Chorus of Power - Cartwheel Arts	-	500	-	500
Chorus of Power - Go Fund Me	-	703	-	703
	<u>3,521</u>	<u>6,924</u>	<u>306</u>	<u>10,751</u>
TOTAL FUNDS	<u>4,681</u>	<u>5,801</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>10,482</u>

SOUL SISTERS: EMPOWERING PEOPLE

**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS - continued
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 29 MARCH 2023**

5. MOVEMENT IN FUNDS - continued

Net movement in funds, included in the above are as follows:

	Incoming resources £	Resources expended £	Movement in funds £
Unrestricted funds			
General fund	1,936	(3,059)	(1,123)
Restricted funds			
Action Together - 100 Stories of Strength Podcast	-	(185)	(185)
The Good Things Foundation - Digital Skills Funding	2,900	(5,506)	(2,606)
Near Neighbour	-	(192)	(192)
Action Together Volunteers Celebration Grant	466	-	466
Chorus of Power - Autotrader Foundation	1,001	(173)	828
GMCVO - Culturally Appropriate Mental Health Fund	6,690	(280)	6,410
GM Perinatal/PIMH Peer support	1,000	-	1,000
Chorus of Power - Cartwheel Arts	500	-	500
Chorus of Power - Go Fund Me	703	-	703
	<u>13,260</u>	<u>(6,336)</u>	<u>6,924</u>
TOTAL FUNDS	<u>15,196</u>	<u>(9,395)</u>	<u>5,801</u>

Comparatives for movement in funds

	Net movement in funds £	At 29.3.22 £
Unrestricted funds		
General fund	1,160	1,160
Restricted funds		
Action Together - 100 Stories of Strength Podcast	877	877
The Good Things Foundation - Digital Skills Funding	2,300	2,300
Keep It Safe Training	100	100
Near Neighbour	241	241
MIND Seed Funds	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>
	<u>3,521</u>	<u>3,521</u>
TOTAL FUNDS	<u>4,681</u>	<u>4,681</u>

SOUL SISTERS: EMPOWERING PEOPLE

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS - continued FOR THE YEAR ENDED 29 MARCH 2023

5. MOVEMENT IN FUNDS - continued

Comparative net movement in funds, included in the above are as follows:

	Incoming resources £	Resources expended £	Movement in funds £
Unrestricted funds			
General fund	3,570	(2,410)	1,160
Restricted funds			
Action Together - 100 Stories of Strength Podcast	1,200	(323)	877
The Good Things Foundation - Digital Skills Funding	2,300	-	2,300
Keep It Safe Training	100	-	100
Near Neighbour	705	(464)	241
MIND Seed Funds	150	(147)	3
	<u>4,455</u>	<u>(934)</u>	<u>3,521</u>
TOTAL FUNDS	<u>8,025</u>	<u>(3,344)</u>	<u>4,681</u>

6. RELATED PARTY DISCLOSURES

There were no related party transactions for the year ended 29 March 2023.

7. RESTRICTED FUNDS

Action Together - 100 Stories of Strength Podcast

As part of a wider project, Soul Sisters were awarded funds to write, record, edit and publish a series of podcasts telling women's stories of strength, adversity and their road to happiness and success. We were able to purchase software subscriptions to aid in podcast editing and uploading, promotion and to purchase recording equipment, in addition to purchasing small gifts to participants who shared their stories.

Good Things Foundation

In 2022, Soul Sisters received funding to run Digital Skills and Employability Training in Middleton and Rochdale for people on low and limited incomes, who were not in work, education or training. The project also targeted people who were not native English speakers and who were provided with additional support. The project also supplied attendees with a tablet and 6 months of data to support them in finding work upon completion of the course.

Keep It Safe Training

This money was donated by a local community radio station, Crescent FM, to enable Soul Sisters to run a hate-crime awareness training session for our beneficiaries.

Near Neighbours

This funding supported Soul Sisters in our early days by enabling us to purchase a laptop and an annual subscription to Zoom in order to run online peer support groups, in addition to monies for in-person sessions which covered the costs of refreshments, materials and volunteers' expenses. We also used funds to purchase promotional materials to raise awareness of the charity, and organised surprise Care Packages to be sent out to service users and volunteers to celebrate International Women's Day 2022.

Mind Seed Funding

Soul Sisters was awarded seed funding, on a pre-loaded debit card, before we had access to a bank account, to help get the organisation up and running. It enabled us to buy resources for and run community group sessions, both face-to-face and online.

Action Together Volunteers Celebration Grant

This funding, linked to Volunteers Week 1-7 June 2022, aimed to help Soul Sisters celebrate our Volunteers and Trustees by holding a team outing and presenting some volunteers with award certificates for their contribution to the charity's activities.

SOUL SISTERS: EMPOWERING PEOPLE

**NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS - continued
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 29 MARCH 2023**

7. RESTRICTED FUNDS - continued

GMCVO Culturally Appropriate Mental Health Fund - Innovation Grant

"The fund is all about tackling health inequalities that marginalised ethnic communities face when trying to get help from mental health services, in terms of access, experience and outcomes." Soul Sisters applied to provide Mental Health sessions in both Bengali and Urdu, as well as in English. Sessions were to be held both online and in person in Rochdale/Middleton. Additionally, Soul Sisters aimed to develop a Podcast covering mental health topics, in Urdu/Bengali.

GM Perinatal/PIMH Peer Support

This funding was received to enable Soul Sisters to organise and run in-person and online Perinatal and Parent-Infant Mental Health awareness sessions in Greater Manchester, providing advice and information and setting up access to peer support for new and expectant parents.

Chorus of Power

All three funds - Auto Trader Foundation; Cartwheel Arts; GoFundMe are related to the Chorus of Power arts project. Receiving these funds was a condition of obtaining funding from The Arts Council. Soul Sisters were required to obtain funding of £500 via a GoFundMe campaign and match funding from the local authority - Rochdale Borough Culture Network AKA Cartwheel Arts, in addition to the funds from the Auto Trader Foundation. We raised additional funding from our GoFundMe campaign of £203.38 this financial year, plus an additional £121.22 a month after the year-end (£324.60 total).

SOUL SISTERS: EMPOWERING PEOPLE
DETAILED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 29 MARCH 2023

	Year Ended 29.3.23 £	Period 26.5.21 to 29.3.22 £
INCOME AND ENDOWMENTS		
Donations and legacies		
Donations	15,196	8,004
Other income		
Other income	-	21
Total incoming resources	15,196	8,025
EXPENDITURE		
Charitable activities		
Room rent	2,260	310
Insurance	-	348
Light and heat	-	15
Telephone	442	274
Postage and stationery	679	893
Trustee and volunteer expenses	874	869
Materials for charitable activities	673	575
Repairs and renewals	91	40
Project facilitator	3,020	-
Computer expenses	329	-
Training and subscriptions	427	-
Grants to individuals	-	20
	8,795	3,344
Support costs		
Governance costs		
Accountancy and legal fees	600	-
Total resources expended	9,395	3,344
Net income	5,801	4,681

This page does not form part of the statutory financial statements