

DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 SEPTEMBER 2024

The directors present their report and the financial statements for the year ended 30 September 2024.

Purposes and Aims

Our charity's purposes as set out in the objects contained in the company's memorandum of association are:

1. To engage young people in Northern Ireland with issues of poverty, inclusion and justice through working in cross-community teams with disadvantaged children, including Newcomer children.
2. To provide quality educational support for marginalised Indian children through working with Non-Governmental Organisations.
3. To equip marginalised Indian adolescent girls with the emotional resilience and menstrual health knowledge to resist abuse and exploitation.
4. To increase awareness within Northern Ireland of local and global justice issues.

The aim of the charity is to inspire and equip young people to create flourishing communities of justice and compassion, locally and globally, empowering them to Be the Change in the world.

How our activities deliver public benefit

Within Northern Ireland

Be the Change Schools programme for sixth-form students in NI secondary schools is flourishing and has gained an excellent reputation amongst post-primary schools. Reaching across traditional social and religious boundaries, it brings together pupils from schools on both sides of the community, facilitating their development as future leaders of an inclusive Northern Ireland.

Sixteen schools in cross-community teams took part in **Be the Change Schools 2023-24, with 172 sixth-form students** participating in the year-long programme. The expansion of this programme has necessitated the appointment of a part-time education officer and we have been delighted to recruit Janice Armstrong, an experienced primary school teacher.

The Be the Change programme is delivered as an Award to ensure that responsibility is taken by the students rather than their teachers. All aspects must be completed including participation in workshops, tasks and fundraising in order to achieve the Award with **over 89% of the students** successfully completed all aspects by the end of the school year.

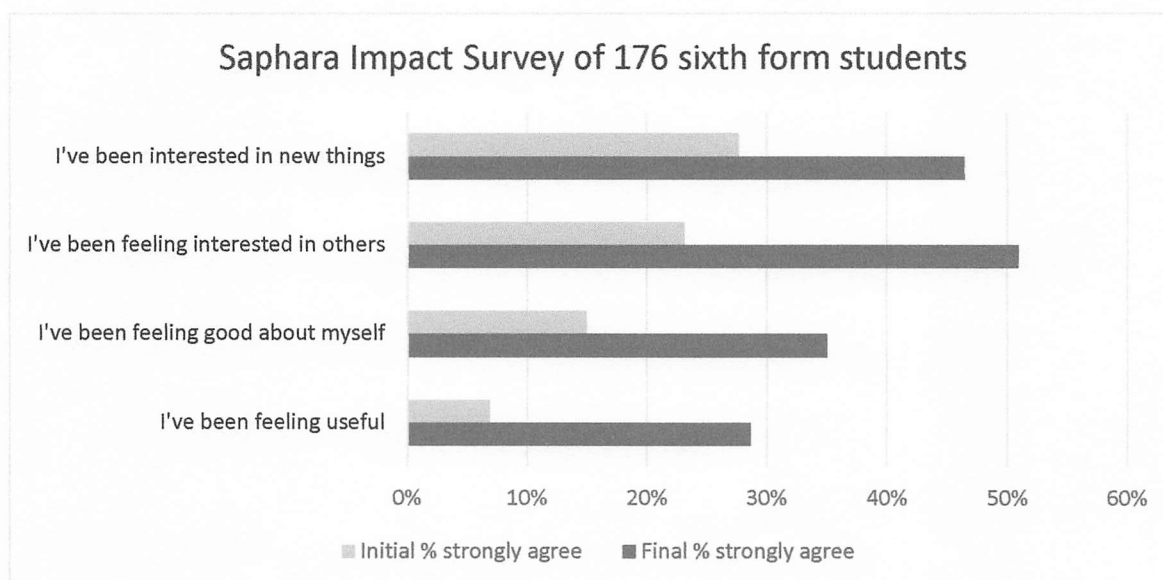
The climax of the Award was the **Newcomer Welcome Days** held during Refugee Week in June when the students hosted 302 Primary 5 children from ten primary schools in socially deprived areas of Belfast at affirming educational fun days at Stranmillis University College. The majority of these children were from refugee and asylum seeker families. We were delighted that **Robbie Meredith from BBC Newsline featured Saphara Newcomer Welcome Week** with interviews with both newcomer children and sixth form students.

The principal of St Bride's Primary School commented, *'The Saphara Team do incredible work! Engaging children in a Shared Education initiative enriches pupils' educational experience in a still divided Northern Ireland. My Primary 5s always come home filled with enthusiasm and confidence'*

A key aspect of the Award is fundraising for our Indian partner schools and for the Newcomer events. The young people and their 18 schools raised an **impressive £54,274** exceeding their target by 20%.

The impact of the Be the Change Award on the **positive mental health of young people** has been commented on by both teachers and participating students in past years. This year we have therefore extended the Saphara Impact Questionnaire to measure mental health and emotional resilience as well as attitudes towards diversity and inclusion. As before, a baseline measure was taken at the start of the programme and a final measure at the end. We are grateful to **Prof Siobhan O'Neill, Northern Ireland Mental Health Champion**, for her advice in creating this assessment tool.

The survey results showed that the Saphara Be the Change Award has a very significant positive impact on the mental wellbeing of the participating young people.



Be the Change Colleges was equally successful, with 23 teaching students from St Mary's and Stranmillis University Colleges hosting a two-day Newcomer Welcome event for 81 children from St Paul's, Falls Road and Fane Street Primary Schools, of whom 70% were from refugee families. We recognise the vital nature of this work in contributing to the professional development of future teachers, and the importance of inclusive classrooms to ensure a peaceful future for Northern Ireland.

We are delighted to once more be able to take teams to India after being suspended during Covid. A group of women who had been planning to visit India in March 2020 were finally able to embark on their Saphara journey in April 2024. Dr Christine Burnett and former Saphara financial controller, Flo Adair led the **team of 20 women, who used their professional expertise** to run workshops for women in Himalayan villages on the menopause together with an eye clinic to provide reading glasses. Equally well received were sessions for adolescent girls on menstrual health and on leadership.

We were also pleased to resume the **College India Team for 12 student teachers** and two lecturers from St Mary's and Stranmillis University Colleges, led by Paula Stronge and Janice Armstrong in April 2024. Both Colleges recognise the value of this experience for their students in developing their professional skills in the affirming culture of SNEHA school in Dehradun.

One student commented, *'This trip has allowed me to see the positive impact that teachers can have on children's lives in boosting children's confidence and self-esteem. It has made me want to continue to travel to disadvantaged schools in the future.'*

Within India

Saphara continues to work with grassroots NGOs to support the delivery of high-quality education to marginalised children. These partnerships enable us to give strategic help with maximum impact on local communities.

The Saphara Back to School programme introduced in the aftermath of the pandemic has evolved into an **educational support programme** to ensure that the poorest children can attend our NGO partner schools. This provides fee support, school uniforms, midday meals and books for these children and is a worthwhile use for the excellent fundraising of the students on the Be the Change Schools Award.

The **Girl Champions programme** continues to enable thousands of adolescent girls to flourish, expanding in the past few years into impoverished areas in the tribal state of Jharkhand. This health and resilience empowerment programme builds self-esteem, encourages girls to value themselves and gives them the skills and confidence to resist abuse, exploitation and child marriage (especially prevalent in tribal communities).

The crucial element in programme delivery is the **training of local tribal teachers as Master Trainers**, meeting twice yearly in Ranchi for a four-day training course led by Saphara CEO Dr Christine Burnett. These women then lead the programme in their schools, training other teachers as facilitators and leading group sessions with the girls.

A **strategy conference entitled 'Refreshing our Vision for Transforming Girls'** was held in Ranchi in September 2024 and attended by 18 senior leaders and teacher representatives from six partner NGOs together with Christine Burnett, Gracy Andrew, lead trainer, and Kathy Walkling from Eco Femme. Over three days, the delegates discussed how the curriculum could be adapted to better reflect tribal culture and the lives of the participating girls, thereby enhancing its impact. Curriculum revision is currently underway.

Following the conference, Christine visited schools run by PSS and Daughters of St Anne's in rural areas of Jharkhand where these NGOs are seeking to bring transformation to impoverished communities, with **female literacy being shockingly low at under 25%** in some areas.

We continue our partnership with Eco Femme, which provides washable organic sanitary pads to adolescent girls, made by local women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This year Saphara funded pads for almost 1000 adolescent girls (providing 4,500 pads in total). A senior Eco Femme trainer joined the Saphara Women's team in April to run menstrual health workshops for 135 girls in Himalayan village schools supported by MGVS.

Financial Review

The total income for the year ended 30th September 2024 was £224,682 compared to £192,330 in the previous year. Fundraising by young people from schools and colleges taking part in the Be the Change programme continued to increase as the number of participating students increased, with the students engaging enthusiastically with the opportunity to support the work of Saphara. In addition, the women's team going to India raised a substantial contribution to funds.

We were delighted to be awarded generous grants from Ardbarron Trust, TBF Thompson Trust, Benefact Trust, Stansfield Trust and House of Vicryn totalling £41,333. As a result of this funding and continued and increased generosity of individual donors, Saphara ended the year with a surplus of £21,462.

Principle source of funding

The table below shows the source of funding in 2023/24

Fundraising schools	24%
Fundraising colleges	13%
Fundraising women	12%
Trusts	18%
Gift aid received	11%
Voluntary donations	14%
College funding	8%

Spend on charitable activities

Our accounts show how we have spent our resources across our three main activities – Northern Ireland cross-community schools programme, holistic educational support for marginalised Indian children, especially adolescent girls, and local and global justice awareness programmes. Our combined governance costs and marketing spend was less than 6% of our total spend. We remain thankful to volunteers who ensure that all overhead costs are kept to a minimum and ensure that a high proportion of our resources are spent directly on our charitable activities.

Reserves Policy

The directors have examined the charity's requirements for reserves in light of the main risks to the organisation.

The balance of our general reserves of £154,778 (2023 £130,316) is equivalent to approximately 9 months' running costs. The directors are planning to distribute some of the surplus generated in the later part of the year in the 24/25 year, with a view retaining reserves at around the level of the previous year.

Plans for Future Periods

We have made significant progress with plans to expand the work of Saphara both in India and N. Ireland, including

- Expanding the Be the Change School Award to more NI schools and sixth form students.
- Expanding Newcomer Welcome Week to more primary school children.
- Recruited an additional part-time staff member.
- Engaged more student teachers in both Newcomer and India programmes.
- Developing Girl Champions with NGO leaders to make more relevant to tribal communities, with a focus on period dignity approach.
- Continuing to support educational access for the most marginalised Indian children.

Structure, Governance and Management

Governing Document

Saphara is a charitable company limited by guarantee, incorporated on 9 July 2008 and governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association dated 4 July 2008. The memorandum and articles were updated on 4th October 2022.

In the event of the company being wound up, the liability in respect of the guarantee is limited to £1 per member of the charity.

Recruitment and Appointment of Directors

New directors of the company are appointed by recommendation of the existing directors by ordinary resolution. The company may also by ordinary resolution determine the rotation in which any additional directors are to retire.

Unless otherwise determined by ordinary resolution the number of directors shall not be subject to any maximum but shall not be less than one.

Director Induction and Training

New directors are given a briefing of the organisation as a whole. This includes an explanation as to their duties and responsibilities. They are encouraged to understand fully their role as directors.

Risk Management

The trustees have assessed the major risks to which the charity is exposed and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate exposure to the major risks. Saphara's register of risks is updated annually as part of its business plan review and is available for public distribution on request. Our risk assessments and safeguarding and child protection policies have been evaluated and our procedures and policies have been deemed to be of the highest standard.

Organisational Structure

The Board of Directors administer the charity by way of quarterly meetings and are responsible for the strategic direction and policy of the charity. During the year the Board had nine directors from a variety of professional backgrounds relevant to the work of the charity.

Approved by the Board on 28th May 2025 and signed on its behalf by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Angus Beck', with a stylized, flowing script.

Dr Angus Beck, Chair of Saphara Board