

F=ERWARD

ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024



TRANSFORMING LIVES TOGETHER

CONTENTS

Reflection 2023–24	4
Vision, values and strategy	6
What drives our work?	10
Our year in achievements, awards and pictures	14
Our programme approach	18
Partnerships: Co-creating programmes to transform lives	20
Building bridges and partnerships to provide culturally appropriate support services	26
Empowering the next generation: Shaping young women into confident and resilient leaders	30
Training services for professionals: Empowering change through collaboration	38
Research: Shaping the policy agenda for African women and girls	41
Appreciation from FORWARD	43
Annual finances	44
Our FORWARD team	46
How to support us	47

Published in April 2025 Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development (FORWARD) © All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, without the prior written permission of the publishers, except in the case of brief quotations included in reviews or articles, where the publishers are fully referenced.

REFLECTION

2023–2024

‘Transforming lives together’ has always been at the heart of FORWARD’s mission to end violence against women and girls (VAWG). Despite rising demand and a challenging economic-political climate, our work highlights the power of collective action, change makers and strong partnerships in driving impactful change. We recognise and value the diverse skills, perspectives, lived experiences and resources that make this transformation possible.

FORWARD’s partnership approach provides funding and sustained technical support to build the competency, capacity and resilience of our partners. By co-delivering programmes at various levels, we maximise our outreach and further our mission to transform the lives of women and girls, enabling them to thrive. In this report we are delighted to showcase FORWARD’s achievements, our collaboration with young people, and our partnerships across the UK and Africa.

Our commitment to young women’s leadership is reflected in initiatives such as the TuWezeshe Young Women’s Leadership Fellowship, the Young Women’s Advisory Council, and School Training. These programmes have laid the foundations for sustainable young women-led movements, particularly the impactful work of Home Girls Unite.

In the past year we have reflected on our strategy, our strengths and our services and worked collectively to chart a new path, building on our past to reinforce our transforming responses to violence and abuse that affects African, Black and minoritised women and girls. We are proud of our new strategy which focuses on the six Es – **engage, educate, expand, empower, elevate and enhance.**

“FORWARD’s partnership approach provides funding and sustained technical support to build the competency, capacity and resilience of our partners.”

Additionally, we highlight the invaluable work of FORWARD’s community team, who engage with Community Champions, support vulnerable women and provide training to co-deliver local outreach. Their efforts are instrumental in challenging harmful social norms and attitudes, fostering sustainable efforts to tackle VAWG.

Despite the impact of the cost of living crisis, which has narrowed funding streams across the VAWG sector and increased demand for our services, our work has been able to continue through the steadfast support of funders, public donations, legacies and Friends of FORWARD whose generosity helps to sustain our work. To our board, staff, volunteers and advisors: your unwavering commitment is the heartbeat of our work. Thank you for making our vision a reality.

ENGAGE
EDUCATE
EXPAND
EMPOWER
ELEVATE
ENHANCE



Dr Titilola Banjoko OBE
Chair, Board of Trustees



Naana Otoo-Oyortey MBE
Executive Director

VISION, VALUES AND STRATEGY

Our vision

We are working for the day when African, Black and minoritised women and girls will live in dignity, are healthy, and enjoy equal rights free from fear of violence.

Our mission

Transforming responses to violence against African, Black and minoritised women and girls through the delivery of specialist support services, capacity development, partnerships and community interventions.



Our values

Grounded

We are led by African, Black and minoritised women. This means our roots and our hearts are in the communities we work with. They set our agenda, guide our decisions and sustain the change we create together.

Bold

We will always speak out about the issues that face African, Black and minoritised women and girls, no matter how uncomfortable some may find them. We have been doing this for over 40 years, and we're not about to stop now.

Nurturing

We help African, Black and minoritised women and girls see their innate strength and dignity, enabling them to find the courage to lead and create the change they deserve.

Trusted

We are open, honest and ethical in everything we do. We are incredibly dedicated to the communities we work with – and that's why we don't jump on bandwagons or get distracted by short-term trends. We stay true to our people and our purpose.

Equal

We are here to make sure the rights of African, Black and minoritised girls and women are upheld, their voices are heard, and their lives are valued – just like everyone else's.

Together

We believe that lasting change has to come from within, so we don't do top-down transformations. We work with people and partners at a local level, building on their insights and sharing our expertise, so that when we have gone the change lives on.

Strategy

Our new strategy has six definitive E-goals that encapsulate our overall approach:

Enhance organisational resilience

We will strengthen FORWARD's financial resilience, programme effectiveness, impact and learning.

Engage decision makers

We will enable African, Black and minoritised women and girls to use their agency and lived experience to influence policy and funding decisions on abuse and gender equality.

Empower communities

We will support communities in tackling violence against women and girls, through capacity building, access to holistic support and well-being services.

Educate professionals

We will enable frontline agencies and schools to become culturally competent, and embed inclusive and equitable responses that protect support everyone's right to thrive.

Elevate young women leaders

We will nurture resilient young African, Black and minoritised leaders to drive social change movements in their communities and beyond.

Expand partnerships

We will strengthen existing and new partnerships and young women-led organisations, enabling them to deliver transformative change for African, Black and minoritised women and girls.

GOAL 5

GOAL 6

GOAL 1

GOAL 2

GOAL 3

GOAL 4

GOALS

Developing our new strategic plan

We spent a fair bit of time in the year working collaboratively with our board of trustees, our staff and our volunteers to develop our new strategic plan with the support of the Better Org consultation firm. This was achieved through a series of workshops, interviews with key stakeholders, partners and funders. This exercise enabled us to reflect, consult and refine our path for the next three years. We found that FORWARD must continue to prioritise external engagement (positioning, programmes, and partnerships) while ensuring these efforts are right-sized to match current capacity.

“The other thing FORWARD does very well is not to steal other people’s achievements... What FORWARD does is to recognise what their strength is and to do it well; I refer to them... You have got big organisations that come as a partner and swallow you. You know, steal your space.”

– Partner organisation, 2023



WHAT DRIVES OUR WORK?

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the world's most pervasive and prevalent human rights violations. The United Nations (UN) defines VAWG as “*violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman, or violence that affects women disproportionately.*” VAWG transcends time periods, cultures and borders, taking place in peacetime and in war, in times of crisis and disaster, at home and in the community, every day, all over the world and throughout a woman's life cycle.

The rollback of human rights and implementation of discriminatory policies rooted in racism, citizenship, gender, class and heteronormative social norms have all exacerbated VAWG. These intersecting challenges deepen poverty, undermine women's autonomy, and harm their health and well-being, making it even harder for them to thrive and build resilience.

These challenges highlight the vital role we play at FORWARD, not only in supporting women at risk but also in educating communities about VAWG and how to address it. In these turbulent times, our work is more critical than ever.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is an incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening, degrading and violent behaviour, including sexual violence, in the majority of cases by a partner or ex-partner, but also by a family member or carer (Women's Aid, 2024).

African, Black and minoritised women, including those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), experience domestic abuse at disproportionate rates due to systemic inequalities, limited access to support services, and shame and stigma.

Female genital mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or any other non-medical injury to the female genital organs. It can cause lifelong physical, reproductive, emotional and psychological trauma, and it can be fatal.

230 MILLION
women have undergone FGM
ACROSS 34 COUNTRIES
and their corresponding diaspora communities

37,000+
GIRLS AND WOMEN
have been found with FGM
IN THE UK SINCE APRIL 2015

(NHS England and Wales)

1.4 MILLION
women have experienced
DOMESTIC ABUSE
IN THE UK

4 MILLION+
GIRLS ARE AT RISK OF BEING CUT
EVERY YEAR GLOBALLY
and it is estimated that by 2030
there will be as many as
68 MILLION
AT RISK OF UNDERGOING FGM

(UNICEF and UNFPA)

Child marriage

Child marriage refers to any formal or informal marriage of a child – female or male – under 18 years of age. This practice, banned under international human rights law, strips girls of fundamental rights to health, well-being, education and personal growth, and is frequently linked to FGM and domestic abuse.

**COMPLICATIONS
TIED TO PREGANCY AND
CHILDBIRTH REMAIN THE
LEADING CAUSE
OF DEATH
for girls ages 15–19**

(Girls Not Brides, 2017)

640 MILLION
women and girls alive today were
MARRIED BEFORE AGE 18
AND 150 MILLION
more girls could become
CHILD BRIDES BY 2030

(UNICEF, 2023)

Sexual harassment and assault

Sexual harassment and assault both involve unwanted sexual behaviour. Harassment encompasses non-physical acts like unwelcome comments or advances, while assault includes physical violations such as non-consensual touching or rape. Together, they represent a spectrum of violence that undermines a woman or girl's safety, dignity and autonomy.

63% of African, Black and minoritised
young women in London
STAYED SILENT
about sexual harassment
OR ASSAULT,
WITH ONLY 13%
of incidents reported to the police

1 in 4
women have been raped or
SEXUALLY ASSAULTED
AS AN ADULT IN THE UK



AS MANY AS
70,000
RAPES WERE RECORDED
From October 2023 to September 2024

OUR YEAR IN ACHIEVEMENTS, AWARDS AND PICTURES

ACHIEVEMENTS

796

statutory professionals were trained across health, education, probation, social care and other frontline services to better respond to women and girls from African, Black and minoritised communities affected or at risk of harmful practices and abuse.

283

women across London were supported through our culturally appropriate specialist counselling and advisory support.

8

by-and-for partner organisations were supported in Africa and the UK.

592

community women were supported through outreach and advocacy work.

1,229

students benefited from our school sessions on healthy relationships and VAWG.

AWARDS

Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO) True Honour Award 2024 – Winner of Social Recognition for Outstanding Organisation Tackling Honour-Based Abuse.

IKWRO
WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATION

TRUE
HONOUR
AWARDS

Girls Not Brides UK was shortlisted for a Charity Times Award under the "Campaigning Team of the Year" category. Being shortlisted for this prestigious award is testament to the incredible work that Girls Not Brides UK and the associate legal team put into the campaign to raise the legal minimum age of marriage in England and Wales to 18 with no exceptions. FORWARD is one of the co-chairs of Girls not Brides UK, which has 27 members.



PICTURES

Advocating for access to reconstructive services for FGM survivors in the UK



Attendees at the first national stakeholder event held by ACERS

FORWARD is a founding member of ACERS (Advocating for Access to Clitoral Reconstruction Surgery and Emotional Support for FGM Survivors), a new coalition of FGM health experts, survivors with lived experience and charity organisations working collectively to advocate for the delivery of reconstruction surgery and psychosexual therapy services for the UK. The main goal of ACERS is to develop the needed evidence base to advocate for reconstructive services for women affected by FGM in the UK.

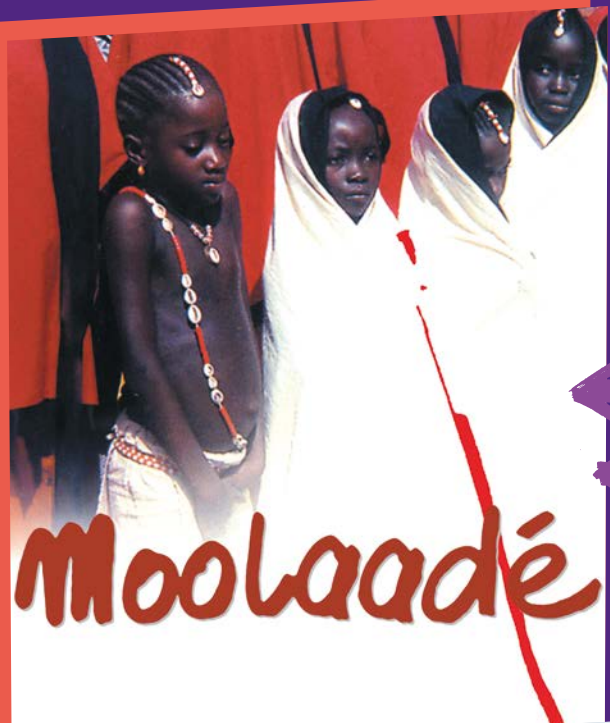
Q-SEED: A pilot founder leadership programme

The Q-SEED Leadership Residential Training for Founding Leaders in Warwick University Q-SEED is a ground-breaking two-year partnership project funded jointly by Barrow Cadbury Trust and the Lloyds Bank Foundation. Q-SEED is a partnership pilot project led by FORWARD with Black Men 4 Change, Change Grow Live, and CLINKS. Q-SEED is supporting a cohort of 15 BGM leaders in the criminal justice ecosystem to influence and spearhead change.



Celebrating Black History Month

Celebrating Black History Month 2024 in Bristol focused on "Reclaiming Narratives and Amplifying Community Champions." This partnership event showcased the work of 10 newly-trained community champions who support community outreach and engagement activities.



Moolaadé

FORWARD organised a special screening of Moolaadé (2004) as part of Black History Month 2024, 20 years after the premiere in London of the film directed by the acclaimed filmmaker Ousmane Sembène. The film explores powerful themes of resistance, community, gender-based violence and a woman's courage to fight for what is right. This event also marked the 10th anniversary of the passing of Efua Dorkenoo OBE, the founder of FORWARD. The post-screening discussion delved into legacy, activism, and the global campaign on FGM.



OUR PROGRAMME APPROACH

We focus on amplifying the voices and experiences of

African, Black and minoritised women and girls to transform their lives. We provide specialist support on the ground through bringing together partners and communities, developing skills and knowledge, and nurturing resilient leaders.

The goals that inform our partner work are:



Influence the agenda on violence against women

by increasing engagement with policymakers to promote holistic policy approaches to VAWG that include prevention, protection, prosecution and provision of services, with a focus on FGM, sexual violence and child marriage.

Cascade evidence-based interventions and good practice in social norm change

through improved design of programmes, generation of evidence and strengthened capacity of the partners we work with.

Nurture a resilient and empowered generation of young women leaders

by building a strong sisterhood and activist movement, equipping them with the skills, confidence, and support to transform their own lives and those of their peers. Our programmes for young women help to ensure they are resilient, skilled, empowered and dynamic change makers.

Educate and enable key professionals and communities to lead change

by focusing on improved knowledge and capacity of professionals to appropriately respond and protect women and girls from harm. Additionally, there is a need to educate African, Black and minoritised communities and women on their rights.

Strengthening organisational, capacity, resilience and impact

which forms the foundation for delivering our mission to end multiple forms of VAWG. We focus on organisation-wide systems, staff capacity and well-being as well as on financial sustainability and impact.



PARTNERSHIPS: CO-CREATING PROGRAMMES TO TRANSFORM LIVES

We believe that when diverse strengths, expertise and passion come together, our collective impact is amplified. Partnerships form a major strategy for amplifying our work on transforming responses to tackling VAWG that affects African, Black and minoritised women and girls.

FORWARD prides itself on its partnership work, and we support our partners' needs through capacity building, financial support, advocacy, campaigning, research, network building, and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). This enables us to strengthen our actions and amplify our collective approach to creating transformational change. In this section we throw a spotlight on some of our key partners.



Spotlight on Layla Ismail, Development Manager of Refugee Women of Bristol (RWoB)

Organisation Name:
Refugee Women of Bristol (RWoB)

Location:
Bristol

Issue Area:
Refugee and asylum-seeking communities

Duration:
Since 2009

Project:
Mend the Gap – The National Lottery Community Fund



The impact of the partnership on RWoB and the wider community

FORWARD is RWoB's biggest and most strategic partner and ally. The shared values and approach enhance our working relationship and ensure that service designs and approaches are collaborative. Access to funding over the years has helped RWoB to grow and sustain their income and resources. We share training, events and expertise in delivering the unique Mend the Gap project in Bristol, which continues to empower refugee and asylum-seeking women to raise their voices and influence local services. Our partnership's impact is evidenced in the [personal] growth of some of our staff, trustees, and volunteers who have been part of FORWARD's Community Development Project. They transformed our organisation's existence and embedded their work in a community engagement approach.

The insights and learning gained from this partnership with FORWARD

I've found proximity to FORWARD's senior leadership to be particularly helpful in shaping my leadership journey. As African women, who have strong roots in our communities, we have much to learn from each other and challenges to share about our experience challenging harmful traditional practices and taboos in our communities.

Spotlight on Rehema Konza, Director of Women Empowering and Entrepreneurship Development Organization (WEEDO), Tanzania

Organisation Name:
Women Empowering and Entrepreneurship Development Organization (WEEDO)

Location:
Tanzania

Issue Area:
Young women's education and economic empowerment

Duration:
Since 2022

Project:
Capacity development funded by FORWARD due to the generous support of our donors



The impact of FORWARD's partnership on the work of WEEDO

The safeguarding policy introduced through FORWARD's support has fostered an environment where young girls actively participate and engage in inclusive discussions with management. This programme has built a sense of togetherness and mutual respect within WEEDO. We have also strengthened protecting children and adolescents in our community. This has raised awareness about the importance of respecting rights and treating everyone equally.

The capacity-building support and leadership training has greatly improved our project management practice, our organisational structure and staff roles. With the skills and knowledge gained, WEEDO is now more effective in planning, executing and measuring the impact of our programmes. This has also fostered creativity among staff and improved performance. The training has enhanced our ability to deliver training programmes for our beneficiaries, improving their employability.



The insights and learning gained from this partnership with FORWARD

Through training and mentorship, we have gained tools to prioritise long-term goals, align them with our organisational mission, and make informed decisions. This has strengthened our leadership in guiding the organisation with a clear vision and a strategic direction, ensuring that every action taken contributes to the broader impact we aim to achieve. Also, FORWARD's focus on inclusive practices has helped us transform our leadership style. We learned the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives, empowering staff at all levels, and fostering open communication within the organisation.

Furthermore, we learned that this partnership was not just about receiving support but about strengthening our commitment to serving our community. This shift has cultivated a culture of shared ownership, where team members feel valued and actively contribute to our growth, leading to more effective and cohesive leadership.

Spotlight on Mary Stevens, Programme Coordinator, Girl-to-Girl Empowerment Movement (G2G), Sierra Leone

Organisation Name:
Girl-to-Girl Empowerment Movement (G2G)

Location:
Sierra Leone

Issue Area:
Young women’s leadership and advocacy

Duration:
Since 2009

Project:
Capacity Development funded by FORWARD due to the generous support of our donors

The impact of FORWARD’s partnership on the work of G2G

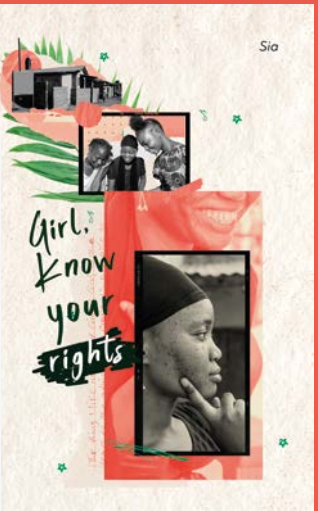
Since the inception of G2G, FORWARD has provided access to funding from trusts and foundations and individual donors, mentorship and technical support, and linked us to new opportunities. This has helped the organisation to grow from four community networks to 10 networks with 450 members aged 10 to 35 years. They have guided us in proposal writing and organisational capacity building, including governance finance and strategy. FORWARD has been instrumental in us securing a six-year grant from Comic Relief.

We celebrated G2G’s 10th anniversary last year, and we have transformed into a young women-led space for marginalised young women tackling harmful traditional practices, sexual reproductive health and rights, and the reduction of teenage pregnancy. We have won two national awards for our work with girls and young women in deprived communities.

The insights and learning gained from this partnership with FORWARD

Our partnership with FORWARD has helped us understand the value of organisational development. The development of our systems, staff development, key policies and processes through FORWARD’s sustained technical support has provided the framework for us to improve our performance and expand.

One of my greatest achievements in my leadership journey has been leading the team through a major organisational change to become a fully functioning young women-led organisation, and FORWARD has played a very important role in my leadership journey by providing capacity building training to enhance my performance, especially in my role as the Programme Coordinator.



BUILDING BRIDGES AND PARTNERSHIPS TO PROVIDE CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE SUPPORT SERVICES

At FORWARD, we believe that true and lasting change is achieved through collaboration. By working closely with individuals, organisations and partners at every level, we can reach more women and provide tailored support where it's needed most. Our mission is to offer culturally appropriate services that honour the diverse backgrounds of the women and girls we serve.

Through these partnerships and culturally sensitive approaches, FORWARD continues to make a profound impact on the lives of survivors. Together with communities, organisations and local authorities, we ensure that women and girls receive the support, respect and care they need to overcome the challenges they face.

Here are some of the key services and projects we have been involved in this year:

Delivering pan-London services

At FORWARD, we recognise that the challenges faced by women and girls affected by violence differ across communities. That's why our pan-London services aim to reach as many women as possible throughout London, ensuring that survivors – regardless of their location – have access to the critical support they need.

Our goal is to provide culturally sensitive, tailored services to migrant and African, Black and minoritised women who often face harmful practices like FGM, breast ironing, 'honour'-based abuse, and forced or child marriage. Through partnerships with local councils and organisations, we extend our services across 13 London boroughs, including Barking and Dagenham, Croydon, Lambeth and Southwark.

One of our key partnerships is the ASCENT project, part of the London Violence Against Women and Girls Consortium. Through ASCENT, we collaborate with organisations such as AWRC, IMECE, LAWRS, WGN, SBS, Al Aman (DVIP), Ashiana and IKWRO to provide services that address both domestic and sexual violence. This coordinated approach ensures that women across London can access services that meet their specific needs.

Tackling cancer in African and Arabic-speaking communities: NHS Cancer Detection and Protection Project

Cervical and breast cancers are two of the most pressing health issues affecting our communities, particularly among African and Arabic-speaking populations. A significant barrier to effective treatment is delayed access to specialist clinical services, which often comes too late for many. In response, FORWARD's NHS Cancer Detection and Protection Project was launched in collaboration with NHS England to address these issues head-on by raising awareness and promoting early detection within these communities.

Through this initiative, we focus on increasing confidence and awareness around seeking medical care. The key objective is to provide a platform for women to share their experiences, while offering culturally sensitive guidance on how to overcome the challenges they face when accessing healthcare.

This project also examines the intersectional issues affecting Black women in particular, ensuring that healthcare and well-being services are accessible and responsive to the unique needs of these communities. The initiative collaborates with a range of organisations, including the Groundswell Chinese Welfare Trust, the Sudanese Nubian Association, the Advocacy Project, the Mosaic Community Trust, and the Notting Dale Community Champions Project. Together, these partnerships have expanded the reach and impact of our work, ensuring that diverse communities receive the support and education needed to tackle cancer effectively.

In 2023, we:

- ▶ **delivered 4 workshops**
- ▶ **engaged 175 women and men**
- ▶ **raised awareness of cancer risks and early detection**
- ▶ **improved knowledge and capacity of frontline health work**



Delivering services to women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

FORWARD is committed to supporting women with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) – a government restriction that prevents certain individuals on work, family or student visas from accessing welfare services. This policy puts survivors of abuse in vulnerable situations, making it difficult for them to seek and access help.

FORWARD provides culturally appropriate support for women with NRPF, offering specialised services that reduce risks for survivors and their children. These services are essential for women on spousal visas or those fleeing dangerous situations, providing safety, stability, and hope for a better future.

Case study 1: MA's journey to safety

My name is MA and I am from Sudan. I was forced into an arranged marriage with my cousin and moved to the UK. He abused me, both physically and emotionally, even threatening to take my child from me. One day, a friend gave me the contact information for FORWARD's community support worker. She made me feel safe, understood and strong. With FORWARD's help, I managed to secure child benefits and open a bank account. I now have indefinite leave to remain in the UK, and I can raise my daughter in safety, all thanks to FORWARD.



Floating Support Service (FSS)

The Floating Support Service (FSS) is a pan-London initiative that offers tailored support to domestic abuse survivors in safe accommodation. FORWARD, in collaboration with 10 other organisations, provides specialist services, safety planning, and information on legal rights and options. This service empowers survivors to take control of their lives, ensuring they have access to resources that help them rebuild.

Coffee mornings and community outreach

In 2023 and 2024 our coffee mornings, held both virtually and in-person, continued to be a vital source of support and education for women. These gatherings provide safe spaces where women can share their experiences and learn more about issues like domestic violence and FGM. This year we reached over 2,200 participants and trained 188 community champions to continue spreading awareness and supporting their communities.

The Ealing Project: Educating and empowering communities

In Ealing, FORWARD has launched a targeted initiative that focuses on empowering communities affected by FGM. In partnership with Ealing Council, The Vavengers, WGN and Local Authority VAWG teams, the Ealing Project bridges the gap between survivors and service providers. Through this project, we educate the community about the harmful effects of FGM while empowering professionals and community members with the knowledge they need to support survivors and prevent future harm.

Case study 2: MH's Story of Recovery

My name is MH and I am 26 years old. I live in Ealing and had been suffering from depression and trauma caused by FGM. The pain was unbearable – especially during my menstrual cycle – and no amount of medical help could ease my suffering until I came to FORWARD in June 2023. FORWARD provided me with emotional support and referred me to the Sunflower Clinic at Queen Charlotte's Hospital, where I underwent a de-infibulation procedure. After surgery and counselling, my life began to improve. I finally felt hopeful again, thanks to FORWARD.



EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION: SHAPING YOUNG WOMEN INTO CONFIDENT AND RESILIENT LEADERS

At FORWARD, empowering the next generation of leaders is key to addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG). Our work is centred on creating spaces where young women can be educated, supported and galvanised to shape the future of feminist activism. Through programmes like TuWezeshe and partnerships such as with Home Girls Unite, we are leading the charge to equip young women with the tools they need to confront and address VAWG in all its forms.



TuWezeshe Akina Dada programme

The TuWezeshe Akina Dada programme, meaning “empowering our sisters”, continues to be a cornerstone of FORWARD’s mission to nurture feminist leadership among young African, Black and minoritised women. TuWezeshe fellows have engaged in comprehensive feminist leadership training, covering topics such as human rights, feminist principles, sexual and reproductive health, and well-being. This immersive

programme builds the confidence and leadership skills needed to lead advocacy efforts against VAWG.

A key element of the programme is its mentorship component, where fellows are paired with established women leaders who guide them in developing effective advocacy strategies. Each fellow receives seed funding to implement these projects, which range from community mobilisation and policy advocacy to creative campaigns. The projects are ultimately tailored to address VAWG in culturally relevant and innovative ways, ensuring that the next generation of leaders can bring about real change.



A TuWezeshe fellow's story

Afua Nkansah-Asamoah's journey:

As a participant in the TuWezeshe Leadership programme, Afua Nkansah-Asamoah launched the Young Fem Alliance as her Social Action Project. This initiative focuses on addressing gender power imbalances and building alliances with young men to help them understand how their identities and actions impact the women around them.

Afua shared how the TuWezeshe programme connected her leadership skills with her African heritage, empowering her to confront gender-specific societal challenges. Through mentorship and workshops, she gained confidence and advocacy skills, while the sisterhood network offered her a transformative support system.

Her advice to new participants is simple: “Leadership is a journey. Believe in your potential, seek out mentors, and never underestimate the power of your voice. Stay committed to your vision and let your passion drive you forward.”



Hajer Adrwish's journey:

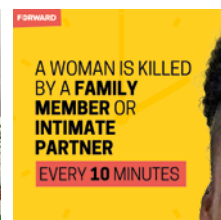
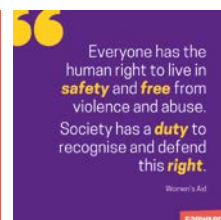
For Hajer Adrwish, a sexual health and relationship educator, the TuWezeshe programme was a turning point in her activism. Drawn to the programme's focus on marginalised communities, she gained confidence in addressing VAWG. TuWezeshe helped her approach activism with an intersectional lens, incorporating the diverse experiences of women into her work.

The mentorship and networking opportunities further strengthened her advocacy, allowing Hajer to collaborate with other advocates to push for meaningful change in the fight for women's rights.

Hajer's advice for newcomers: "Embrace your journey! Be excited about how you will change and grow throughout the fellowship."

TuWezeshe Homecoming

In November 2024 the 2024 cohort gathered for the TuWezeshe Homecoming, a celebration of individual achievements that also fostered stronger connections and reinforced the sisterhood among TuWezeshe fellows and friends. The event provided an opportunity for reflection and growth, with activities centred on self-care, female empowerment, and building solidarity. Through team-building exercises, participants deepened their bonds and supported one another in their shared journey.



The African Women Leadership Forum:

Afua's TuWezeshe Challenge project brought together 30 women, equipping them with leadership skills and providing a powerful platform to address critical issues affecting women and girls in their communities. Through transformative "Let's Talk About It" sessions, participants shared their personal journeys, creating a collective narrative of resilience, courage and empowerment. The project inspired women to reflect on their experiences, embrace their potential, and take steps to create lasting change.

A highlight of the project is a forthcoming book that chronicles the transformative journeys of these 30 young African women. The book captures their personal stories, reflections and aspirations, interwoven with insights from programme managers and chapters dedicated to the speakers' impactful topics.



Child Mothers Report:

Angella’s TuWezeshe Social Action Project, “Empowering Child Mothers in Uganda”, made a profound impact on the lives of teenage mothers aged 12 to 19, empowering them with knowledge, skills and confidence to shape brighter futures. The project focused on promoting their rights, improving menstrual health, fostering leadership, and creating economic opportunities. Training was provided on menstrual health, teaching participants how to understand their cycles, maintain proper hygiene, manage pain, adopt healthy habits, and break the stigma surrounding menstruation.

The initiative went beyond skills training by nurturing confidence, resilience, self-belief and forgiveness. Local leaders actively supported the effort, committing to improve access to education, vocational training, and community integration for teenage mothers.



**Home Girls Unite:
Nurtured through the
TuWezeshe programme**

Home Girls Unite, co-founded by TuWezeshe fellows Yasin and Hanna, is a powerful testament to the programme’s impact. Born from their shared experiences as eldest daughters from immigrant families, Home Girls Unite addresses the unique challenges this group faces. It offers a safe space where young women can share their stories, find community, and access resources.

Home Girls Unite have worked with key partners including the Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and the National Lottery, in collaboration with FORWARD. These initiatives have provided critical support for women experiencing covert forms of gender-based violence, which are often unrecognised by other organisations. Their work exemplifies the long-term impact of the TuWezeshe programme and its commitment to fostering resilient leaders.



“Collaborative work has allowed us to generate real impact for our community. Working closely with FORWARD has strengthened our ability to serve women and advocate for their rights.”

– Yasin, co-founder, Home Girls Unite



Innovating for the future: New programmes to empower the next generation



At FORWARD, we believe in continuously evolving to create new opportunities for young leaders. This spring/summer, we are excited to launch two new programmes aimed at empowering the next generation of advocates and leaders committed to social justice.

LEAP Programme

The LEAP Programme will equip young people with the skills, confidence and tools to engage in advocacy and activism against VAWG. Through education, hands-on experience and leadership development, participants will gain real-world experience in tackling critical social issues, positioning them as future leaders in the fight against gender-based violence.

UNified Ambassadors Programme

The UNified Ambassadors Programme focuses on elevating young women into leadership roles, particularly those studying at UK universities. By fostering feminist leadership, advocacy and community engagement, the programme will empower participants to lead impactful campaigns addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) on their campuses.

Ambassador responsibilities:

Advocacy:

Lead campaigns to raise awareness of VAWG on campus.

Community engagement:

Drive conversations around intersectional challenges affecting women.

Collaboration:

Work with fellow Ambassadors and FORWARD to amplify advocacy efforts.

These programmes reflect FORWARD's commitment to continuously innovate and empower young leaders to take action against injustice. By investing in the next generation, we are building a future where young voices are at the forefront of the fight for gender equality and social change.

Ayan Mohamed – my journey from Denmark to FORWARD

My fieldwork at FORWARD provided me with a deeper understanding of how organisations address sensitive and complex issues such as FGM. I observed:

The Importance of cultural sensitivity: FORWARD's work requires a deep understanding of the cultural and social dynamics surrounding FGM and gender-based violence.

The role of empowerment: through workshops and dialogues, it became clear how empowerment plays a central role in enabling women and young people to take control of their lives and understand FGM.

Collaboration and networking: FORWARD's teams work closely together internally and with external partners, which is crucial for the organization's success.

“My fieldwork at FORWARD has been an educational and inspiring experience. I gained not only insights into the organisation's work, but also developed my own skills in educational work and facilitation. I will carry these experiences into my future work and continue to support FORWARD's mission.”

– Ayan Mohamed, a student from Denmark who carried out a four-month field study at FORWARD with our youth programme

TRAINING SERVICES FOR PROFESSIONALS: EMPOWERING CHANGE THROUGH COLLABORATION

At FORWARD, we recognise that ending violence against women and girls (VAWG) – including harmful practices like female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, and honour-based abuse – requires a unified and collaborative approach. By partnering with professionals across key sectors such as healthcare, education, law enforcement, social services, and the non-profit space, we work to ensure that those on the frontlines are equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to protect vulnerable women and girls.

Our accredited training programmes

Our training services are tailored to meet the needs of different sectors, providing practical tools to help professionals identify, prevent and respond to VAWG, with a special focus on FGM and other harmful practices. Whether you are a healthcare provider, educator, police officer or social worker, our accredited programmes provide sector-specific knowledge, enabling you to make meaningful change in your day-to-day work.

In the last decade alone, FORWARD has trained over 4,000 professionals through 160 training sessions, helping to create a strong network of advocates across the UK. The interactive sessions are designed to address cultural contexts, legal frameworks and referral pathways, ensuring that professionals are prepared to support survivors and prevent further harm.

Certification and continued professional development

Our training provides professionals with recognised credentials that empower them to take action. Courses like our Responding to FGM Training, accredited by the Open College Network at Level 3, equip participants with essential legal knowledge and practical skills needed to address FGM cases.

Additionally, through our Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes, professionals in fields such as education and healthcare can build on what they have learned, implementing best practices within their work settings. The training is designed to ensure lasting change and improved outcomes for those at risk.

Strengthening our reach through strategic partnerships

These training programmes are enhanced through collaboration with key stakeholders such as the Mayor of London's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), Tower Hamlets, and the Refugee Council, ensuring that our services reach the professionals who need them most. By working with these organisations, we create a unified and impactful response to VAWG.



Demonstrating impact through collective action

Our training services have demonstrated real-world impact, with 92% of participants reporting that the training was directly relevant to their work. Professionals across multiple sectors have praised the training for providing them with the tools to support survivors of violence more effectively.

This success is only possible through the strong partnerships we have built. By fostering relationships with organisations and professionals dedicated to ending violence, we ensure that the tools and knowledge shared in our training sessions lead to tangible improvements in the safety and support of women and girls.

92%

of participants report that our training was directly relevant to their work.



Case study: Collaboration between FORWARD and Imperial College London

Our longstanding partnership with Imperial College London continues to be a cornerstone of our commitment to education, capacity building and community impact. Now in its sixth year, this collaboration remains a dynamic and impactful initiative, offering students invaluable hands-on experience in global health and social inequalities. As part of the Imperial College London Global Health BSc programme, we host between three to six students annually. In the 2023–2024 period alone we welcomed and trained eight medical students, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to work effectively within local health and wellbeing voluntary sector organisations.

Through this initiative, students not only gain critical insights into grassroots health challenges but also contribute meaningfully to our work, supporting vulnerable communities and promoting health equity. Their dedication and fresh perspectives help strengthen our programmes, demonstrating the power of collaboration in driving positive change.



RESEARCH: SHAPING THE POLICY AGENDA FOR AFRICAN, BLACK AND MINORITISED WOMEN AND GIRLS

At FORWARD, research is a vital tool in our mission to advocate for the rights and well-being of African, Black and minoritised women and girls. By conducting targeted studies, we are able to influence policy, elevate underrepresented voices, and drive real change. Below are some key research initiatives we have undertaken to amplify the experiences of African, Black and minoritised women and girls, particularly around issues such as sexual harassment, community advocacy and female genital mutilation (FGM).

Sexual harassment and assault in London public spaces: A survey among young women

Full report available at:
www.forwarduk.org.uk/publications

This quantitative study examines the incidence of sexual harassment and assault faced by young women in public spaces in London. The research particularly aims to better understand how young women from different ethnic backgrounds experience sexual harassment, and how their experiences may differ. The study is based on an online survey among a representative sample of 1,314 young women, aged 16 to 34 and living in Greater London.

Half of all the young women surveyed report experiencing sexual harassment or assault relating to their racial or ethnic identity. Minoritised ethnic young women are significantly more likely than young white women to have experienced racialised sexual harassment, particularly unwelcome comments or catcalling relating to their race or ethnicity (36% vs 26%).



Community Champions – Bridge Builders for Communities and Services

(Forthcoming May 2025)

This qualitative study, spanning 2022 and 2023, focuses on the journeys and voices of community champions in London and Bristol. With data collected from 19 one-on-one interviews and two focus group discussions, this research highlights the experiences, motivations and challenges faced by community members who have been trained as champions. The study also examines the perspectives of the staff supervising the programme, as well as the service users and beneficiaries. Through their stories, the research aims to identify key factors for success and areas for improvement, ensuring that future programmes are even more impactful. This report will serve as a valuable resource for the continued development of community-based initiatives.

Diaspora Change Makers in the Global Movement to End Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

(Published in February 2025)

This ground-breaking study delves into the role of diaspora change makers in the movement to end FGM. Using a qualitative methodology and case study framework, the research examines the motivations and actions of individuals working to eliminate FGM in their communities, both in the diaspora and in countries where FGM is traditionally practised. Conducted over a three-month period, the study engaged 27 participants from 15 diaspora countries and 13 countries of origin, offering a rich, nuanced perspective on the personal and collective efforts to combat FGM. This research highlights the profound impact of diaspora voices in the global fight to end harmful practices, while providing recommendations for supporting these change makers in their vital work.

By conducting research that centres the lived experiences of African women and girls, FORWARD



continues to shape the policy agenda and create opportunities for advocacy and action. These studies not only inform the work we do but also contribute to a broader understanding of how to support vulnerable communities and combat gender-based violence on a global scale.

APPRECIATION FROM FORWARD

We would like to say a huge thank you to the following organisations for their generous support, funding and donations to FORWARD over the period covered by this report:

Barrow Cadbury Trust
Comic Relief - Maanda Programme
Dr Martens Foundation
GLA-ASCENT- MOPAC
GLA - Refuge MOPAC
February Foundation
London Councils
London Borough of Ealing
The London Community Foundation
Lloyds Bank Foundation
MOPAC VAWG Fund
Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC)
The National Lottery Community Fund
Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sports
and The National Lottery Community Fund
Tudor Trust
Harry Gaskell & Kate Wilkinson
Royal Marsden Partners RMP
BME Health Forum
Schwab Charitable Fund

We are extremely grateful to the numerous individual donors and legacies that we have received over the year, which have contributed immensely to the delivery of our programmes. We truly thank you.



ANNUAL FINANCES

Financial Statement 2023-24

	2023-24	2022-23
Incoming Resources		
Donations	92,594	111,838
Grants Receivable	602,836	966,672
Other Income	7,652	3,135
Total	703,082	1,081,645
Expenditure		
Fundraising	1,254	8,182
Charitable Expenses	862,747	858,231
Governance	7,506	4,721
Total	871,507	871,134
Net Incoming Resources	(168,425)	210,511
Reconciliation of Funds		
Total Funds brought forward 01.04.23	783,723	573,212
Total Funds carried forward 31.03.23	615,298	783,723

Balance Sheet as at 31st March 2024

	2023-24	2022-23
Total Assets	694,118	876,947
Less: Liabilities	(78,820)	(93,224)
Total Net Assets	615,298	783,723
Represented By:		
Restricted Funds	40,637	127,126
Designation Funds	206,187	209,969
Unrestricted General Funds	368,474	446,628
Total Charity Funds	615,298	783,723



OUR FORWARD TEAM

Staff

Naana Otoo-Oyortey, MBE
Executive Director

Toks Okeniyi
Head of UK Programmes

Mary Otuko
UK Programme Manager

Amy Abdelshahid*
Head of Evidence and
Knowledge Management

Negar Zaman
Head of Business
Development and Strategy

Wossenyelesh Kifle*
Programme Development
and Partnerships Manager

Fosdicka Crankson
Finance and Operations
Consultant

Rita Janani
Finance and Fundraising
Assistant

Yvette Robbin-Coker
Training and Development
Coordinator

Sahar Zeinelabin*
Training Assistant

Grace Livermore*
Operations and
Research Assistant

Odunayo Oluwadare
Schools and Youth
Programme Officer

Isha Abdelkadir
Youth Programme Officer

Eshraga El-Shaikh
Casework Coordinator

Parese Hibbert
Floating Community
Support Officer

Samah Mohamed
Community Support Worker

Tagwa Ahmed
Community Support Worker

Rania Elbashier
Community Support Worker

**Tirhas Gebreyesus
Mebrahtu**
Community Support Worker

Tigist Wasihun
Community Support Worker

Amber Mitchell-Hanna*
Digital Communications
Officer

Nardos Abebaw
Research and Evaluation
Consultant

Estelle Clayton
Fundraising Officer

Dounia Khier
Fundraising and
Research Intern

Chido Chirimuuta*
Monitoring and
Evaluation Officer

Linda Appiah-Spick*
Senior Communication
Officer

Yasin Bojang*
Programme Intern

Hadeel Elshak
Project Assistant

Trustees

Dr Titilola Banjoko – Chair

Dr Lisa Smith – Treasurer

Dr Sakaria Ali*

Kadra Abdinasir

Joy Fraser-Amosun

Aneisha Obuobie

Vanessa Thomas

Sarah MacDonald*

Volunteers

Michael Coulston
Ayan Mohamed

Young Women's Advisory Council

Catherine Onoselase

Bimpe Lawal

Anjeli Shah

Junayna Al Sheibani

Elise Crawford

Nkechi Adeboye

Sherifat Adeniyi

Agatha-May Akora

Mayowa Osadiya

Francess Okia-Anie

Basma Kamel

Wumi Fagunwa

Samira Shariff

HOW TO SUPPORT US



Our amazing supporters allow us to continue to campaign for African, Black and minoritised women and girls' rights and to inspire young women and girls to become change makers in their communities.

With your donations we are able to run more learning sessions for students and teachers at schools, provide training sessions for healthcare professionals, and increase community awareness and response services for women and girls at risk of FGM and other forms of violence.

Please email us at forward@forwarduk.org.uk for any further information.

**Thank you for
your support.**



Suit 4.8 Chandelier Building
8 Scrubs Lane
London NW10 6RB

Telephone: +44 (0)208 960 4000

Email: forward@forwarduk.org.uk

Website: www.forwarduk.org.uk

X: @FORWARDUK

Facebook: FORWARD UK

Instagram: @FORWARDUK

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/forward-uk/

Registered Charity No: 292403 Company Number: 01921508