



2020 Annual Report

Freedom From Fistula: *transforming the lives of women and children during a global pandemic*

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In 2020, despite the challenges of a global pandemic, our hard working teams provided essential care for women & children in need



18,500

Primary Healthcare consultations provided to children aged 0-15



8855

Immunisations given to protect children aged 0-15



4000+

Women provided with **family planning** and commodities



3395

Babies safely delivered



219

Fistula surgeries performed



94

Teenage girls attended our Dream Girls programme



22

Sexual and Gender Based Violence survivors provided with counselling & medical support



“For all of us, 2020 was a year like no other and that was true for Freedom From Fistula too.”



A message from Dame Ann Gloag

2020 was by far the most challenging year since we started in 2008 but, despite the global pandemic, we are delighted to report that we still helped more than **23,000** women and children in 2020 - thanks to the dedication and commitment of our staff in Africa and the UK.

That is a remarkable achievement that we did not think possible in March last year and my sincere thanks go to the whole team for their unwavering support and hard work to make this possible.

We were equally humbled that our patients continued to trust us throughout the uncertainty of the pandemic and still came to our hospitals and clinics to seek help. They were our inspiration and kept us going on the darkest of days.

Our hospital in Sierra Leone remained open for essential maternity and children's services throughout 2020, with our fistula unit open for about six months of the year. Sadly, our clinics in Malawi and Madagascar had to close in April and were unable to reopen again in 2020 but we are pleased to report they are back up and running in 2021.

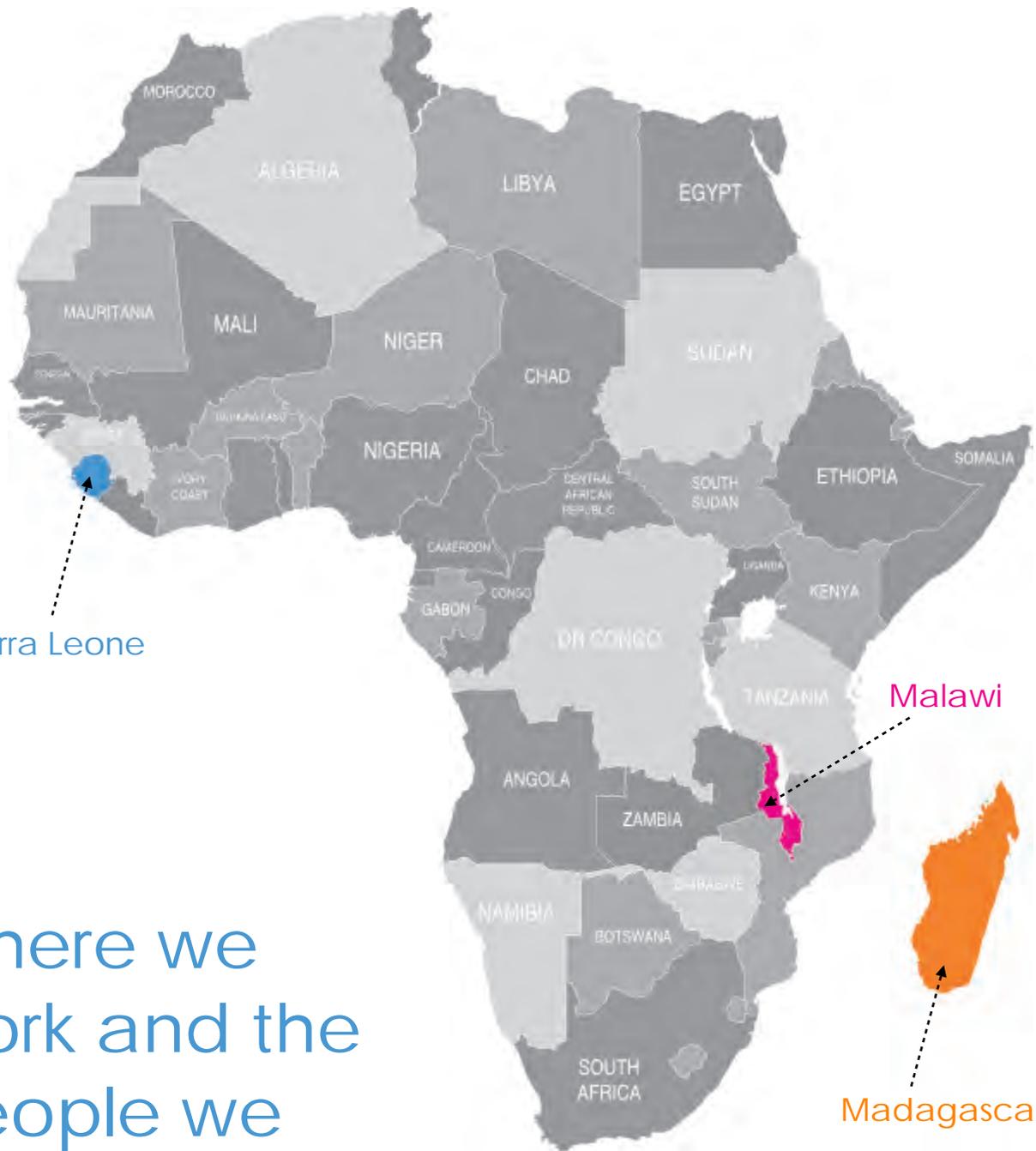
In a normal year, our UK team visits our projects in Africa at least six times, supporting the local management and staff. Sadly, we only managed one visit before travel restrictions were imposed but, thanks to our deep knowledge of the projects and long standing relationships with staff, the switch to distance management via zoom was not as difficult as we had envisaged. In fact, like many others, it forced us to fast forward some investment in technology which will have a positive impact for the future.

All that was achieved in 2020 could not have happened without our loyal supporters. My sincere thanks go to all our supporters who have stayed with us throughout this very difficult time. We are truly humbled by the commitment of individuals and partner organisations who have stuck with us and stepped up when it has been needed most.

2020 was hard and the pandemic will continue to impact our work in 2021. But we survived and will continue to thrive for many years to come – thanks to you, our staff and our patients.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ann Gloag', with a large, stylized flourish above the name.

Founder, Freedom From Fistula



Where we work and the people we serve

	Sierra Leone	Malawi	Madagascar
Population (2020)	7,976,983	19,129,952	27,691,018
Life Expectancy (years)	55.92	65.62	68.21
Infant mortality (infant deaths per 1,000 live births)	70.1	32.6	23
Deaths under age of 5 (per 1,000 live births)	96.3	43.7	34.1

Source Worldometers.info



Fistula

FFF provides free fistula services in three countries - Sierra Leone, Malawi and Madagascar.

In all three countries, our clinics are the only dedicated service providing free surgical treatment for women and girls suffering from obstetric fistula.

In 2020, our fistula unit at the Aberdeen Women's Centre (AWC) in Sierra Leone had to close for six months as it was not deemed an 'essential' service. It reopened again in October with 60 women and girls receiving surgery before the end of the year, thanks to our international surgeons who relocated from Madagascar.

The 'Gladi Gladi' ceremonies leading up to Christmas, which celebrate our patients going home 'dry', were extra special for everyone.

Sadly, in Malawi and Madagascar we had to close our Fistula Care Centres in April and were unable to reopen them due to Covid and Government restrictions.

We supported our staff in these countries by continuing to pay them a percentage of their salary throughout the time we were closed, as well as providing them with much needed maize to help feed their families. This ensured that we retained experienced staff who would be ready to reopen as soon as we were allowed - and that has been a success.

Despite a global pandemic we were able to complete **219** fistula surgeries in 2020

118

Sierra Leone

49

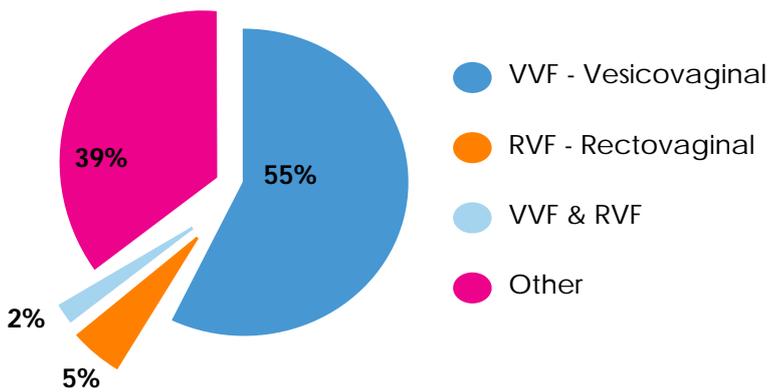
Malawi

52

Madagascar



Surgeries conducted at AWC



"I want to thank God for my life and a very big thank you to AWC and the Doctor that did my surgery. I pray that I will not come here again for more surgeries."

Fatmata's story

Fatmata is 39 years from Bonkoh Mayemi Village Portloko District. She is a trader in small goods.

Fatmata said, "I was 27 years old when I got pregnant for the first time. I had no experience of delivery or signs of labour. At full term I went in to labour for 3 days at home before I was taken to the hospital. I had a still birth and after delivery, due to the prolonged labour, I realised that I no longer had control over my urine and stool".

Fatmata was found by the Aberdeen Women's Centre (AWC) Screening Team in her rural village in northern Sierra Leone and taken to the AWC to receive free surgery to fix her double fistula having suffered incontinence for 12 years.

Fatmata is now dry. She promised to provide counselling to patients in her community going through the same problem and will also tell them of the importance of giving birth in a hospital.



101

We treated 49 fistula patients in **Malawi** including four under the age of 18 and 52 fistula patients in **Madagascar**

Lives transformed

Maternity

As an 'essential' service, FFF was able to keep open the AWC's Maternity Unit throughout 2020 and continue to support our maternity partners in Malawi who also stayed open.

Thanks to the support of Government, partners and donors, the AWC was able to secure enough doctors and PPE to maintain our excellent standard of maternal healthcare including antenatal care, delivery services, and postnatal care.

We were also blessed with the arrival of two international doctors in September who were willing to come and live in Sierra Leone to help us maintain this essential service.

Our training programme for local Medical Officers continued throughout 2020 and the training of student midwives continued when possible.

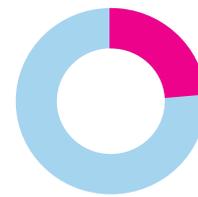
In Malawi, our funding for maternity services at the Achikondi Community Clinic, Mtengowantenga Catholic Hospital and Chiluzi Antenatal Clinic helped them continue with their work to provide safe maternal healthcare throughout 2020.

Our funding helped deliver 1042 babies and helped 151 mothers receive ante-natal care.

We safely delivered

2202

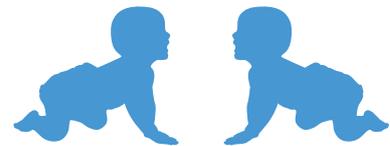
Babies in **Sierra Leone** including



518
teenage
mums



625
c-section
deliveries



40
sets of twins



2
sets of triplets





Tigidankay's story

Tigidankay is 20 years old and a former VVF Patient from Tongo Jayama. She came to AWC in 2018 for a fistula surgery, the surgery was successful and she went back to her village well and dry.

Tigidankay came back to Aberdeen Women's Centre pregnant in September 2020 to access Ante Natal care and to have a safe delivery. She underwent a caesarean section on the 21st November, 2020 and gave birth to a beautiful bouncing baby girl.

"I am happy all through my stay at AWC. I lost my first child due to poor medical facility and it resulted in a fistula. I am very grateful to to all staff at Aberdeen Women's Centre for their care and generosity."

We safely delivered

1042

Babies in **Malawi** including



496
Achikondi
Community
Clinic



546
MCH
Mission
Hospital



94%

of all maternal deaths occur in low or middle-income countries

Source World Health Organisation

99%

of the **2,476** new patients booked at AWC for antenatal care sessions came from slum areas

Safe Deliveries

Save Lives

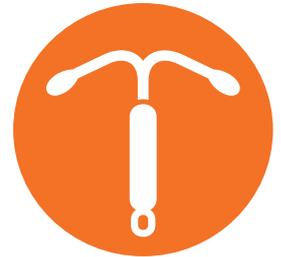
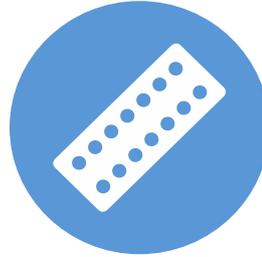
Family Planning

Free family planning commodities and confidential counselling is offered to all fistula patients at the FFF clinics, as well as maternity patients at the AWC when they return for their 6-week post-delivery check-up and parents bringing their children to the Outpatient Children's Clinic (OPC).

There are group sessions for family planning, as well as individual counselling, explaining family planning in the context of safe sex and birth control.

AWC also has a dedicated HIV Nurse who tests and counsels patients, referring them to the local government hospital for antiretroviral treatment. The AWC is set to become an HIV treatment centre in 2021 so patients will no longer have to be referred.

Most commodities are provided to FFF centres by the Ministries of Health, UNFPA and other donors.



The impact

4000+

We helped over 4000 women and girls to access **family planning** commodities, services and counselling





Children

Sierra Leone has one of the world's highest child mortality rates, with 1 in 5 children not reaching their 5th birthday. Reducing child mortality in Sierra Leone is another key focus of FFF at the AWC.

As an 'essential' service, we were able to keep open our Outpatient Children's Clinic (OPC) throughout 2020, providing free primary healthcare to the children of Aberdeen and surrounding communities aged between new-born and 15 years, five days per week.

An average of **80-100** children were seen every day at the OPC for a variety of illnesses such as malaria, typhoid, malnutrition and acute respiratory infections. The AWC also continued to offer free, vital childhood vaccinations throughout 2020 thanks to our partners.

Unfortunately our outreach services to children in the Kroo Bay slum had to be suspended in April for the safety of our staff and were not able to resume in 2020.

Our HIV testing programme continued to provide vital diagnosis for children in 2020, referring them on to other centres for treatment. Thankfully, in 2021, we will be able to provide the anti-viral treatments directly at the AWC following accreditation by the Sierra Leone Ministry of Health.

In 2020 we conducted

18,500

Consultations at OPC

551

Consultations at Kroo Bay Slum

8,855

Immunisations

220

HIV tests for 0-14 year olds

"I am very grateful to Aberdeen Women's Centre for all their good work, their love and care. May God bless you."





Teenagers

We run two supplementary support programmes for teenage mothers at the AWC - the **'Dream Girls' and Training Hostel**.

Last year, **15 girls** graduated from the Training Hostel despite a six month suspension due to Covid. These teenage mothers were trained in cooking, hospitality and childcare and all 15 gained internships at the end of the programme.

The Dream Girls programme was severely impacted by Covid as it was deemed non-essential to bring together groups of teenage mothers for additional support.

The overall goal of the teenage programmes is to transform the lives of first-time teenage mothers through education and empowerment, by rebuilding their self-esteem and confidence, teaching them new skills, and by allowing them to thrive in a safe space with peers. The goal is also to reintegrate the teenagers back into their families and communities and offer support and guidance if they would like to return to school or gain employment.

The Dream Girls and Hostel programmes are supported by the Aminata Maternal Foundation based in Australia.



Graduation

The graduation ceremony for the Hostel trainees took place on the 22nd December 2020 at the Aberdeen Women's Centre. Staff and management of the Centre, parents, friends and loved ones were all present to celebrate their daughters. It was an interactive session where teachers, staff and parents met and were given an opportunity to participate through advice sharing, appreciation and presentation of gifts.

The girls gave song contributions thanking donors for changing their lives for good.

EducAid

In 2019, AWC and EducAid started a joint venture to support up to **10 teenage girls**, post-delivery, to return to school. In January 2020 the programmes team at AWC was very happy, as three of the Dream Girls went back to school with the support of EducAid.

Internship Scheme

AWC has a **Tosi Tosi Internship Scheme**, where former Dream Girls are hired on a six-month contract. The Internship Scheme allows the girls to work at AWC between the hours of 8am and 2pm on weekdays, enabling them to earn some money and develop their skills and knowledge. From 3pm the girls attend school. There are two strands of the scheme - one where the girls rotate within the Domestic department and the other strand which sees the girls rotate on a 6-week cycle between the AWC Laboratory, Immunisation, Pharmacy and Data stations, helping with tasks. During this final strand one girl accompanies the OPC medical team to Kroo Bay every week.

Abioseh's story

Abioseh was abandoned by her mother when she was a baby, at the age of 10 lost her dad, and has been staying with her father's sister ever since.

She heard about AWC through community outreach and she was booked in by the ante-natal team and later joined the Dream Girls classes. Her baby is now eight months old and one of the most beautiful little things.

Abioseh says she appreciates so much that she is still accessing the free medical care at the Children's Clinic and the literacy and counselling classes she received at the AWC motivated her to return to school.

She has started going to secondary school, is in 2nd year and is doing very well.

"At the age of 17 my father's friend showed up and he promised to help and take care of me but he ended up raping me and the rape resulted to pregnancy. He denied the pregnancy. I felt so hopeless and devastated but meeting AWC was a dream come true. I will be forever grateful."



The impact

Health Services provided to Teenage Girls	No of teenage girls
Teenage Girls attended the Dream Girls Programme	94
Teenage girls registered at Maternity Clinic	677
Normal Deliveries	386
C-Section	113
Ante-Natal Visits	1269
Post-Natal Visits	103
Family Planning Services	478

Sexual and Gender Based Violence

We treated **22 SGBV** survivors in 2020 at the Aberdeen Women's Centre. All survivors received free medical care, including surgery where necessary, and counselling sessions from our social worker.

With the help of some of our partners a total of **17** cases were charged to court and **5** perpetrators are running their jail term at the Pademba Road maximum security prison. **12** cases are still at court waiting for court hearings or investigations are still ongoing.

When an SGBV survivor arrives at AWC, dedicated staff are assigned to their care and they are given a dignity kit to make them feel comfortable including clothes and toiletries, a teddy bear or toy and a hot meal. We focus on providing a safe, friendly and welcoming environment.

The AWC team works in partnership with the police, lawyers, advocacy groups and other partners to ensure the best care available for our survivors and strive to ensure justice for them.

36%

Under 10

45%

Aged 11 - 17

18%

Over 18

1 in 3

In Sierra Leone, 1 in 3 women and girls experience sexual or gender based violence in their lifetime

Source United Nations

She deserves
to be safe

Training & Quality Improvement

Capacity building of national staff and quality improvement are an important part of all the FFF projects.

We not only strive to achieve the highest standards of care in our centres but we are also committed to training and upskilling Ministry of Health employees who come to us.

Our surgical, anaesthetic, nurse and midwife training programmes focus on quality of care, quality improvement and respect for patients.

2020 was a challenging year, as some of our training programmes were interrupted, particularly for student placements, but the seconded staff continued with their training throughout the year.

We had to quickly adapt to Covid-19 government restrictions and safety protocols.

At the AWC, which had experienced operating through ebola, we started a triage system very early in the pandemic, ensuring patients were screened for symptoms, social distance was maintained and that everyone, staff and patients, wore a mask. Posters were placed all over the compound to indicate the importance of Covid-19, as well as big water tanks, liquid soap and sanitiser for all departments.

During this difficult time, we received generous donations of some PPE, supplies and food and our long-term donors graciously allowed us to divert their funding to where it was needed most. We thank them all.



News and Events

HRH The Countess of Wessex visits AWC



In **January 2020** we were delighted to welcome Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex to the Aberdeen Women's Centre (AWC) in Sierra Leone when she learned about the work AWC is doing to help child rape victims from across the country.

During her visit, Her Royal Highness met with patients and staff to discuss the problem and learned about what is needed to help the Sierra Leonean government stop rapes happening to the women and girls of Sierra Leone.



HRH The Duchess of Cambridge and HRH The Countess of Wessex commemorate International Nurses' Day with AWC

In **May 2020** nurses from our Aberdeen Women's Centre (AWC) in Sierra Leone, were delighted to participate in a video call with Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cambridge and Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex to celebrate International Nurses Day. Speaking on the call, HRH The Countess of Wessex said, "It was such a wonderful visit (to Aberdeen Women's Centre in January). It's never left me, and it never will. What you do at the Aberdeen Women's Centre is so very special. I just wish there were more of them in Sierra Leone."

Nursing staff at AWC make up 60% of the total staff and work across our maternity, fistula, family planning and child health services. Among the areas discussed in the videocall was how the experience of running the AWC throughout the Ebola epidemic in Sierra Leone helped the team prepare well for Covid-19, including imposing in early March strict IPC measures and screening of patients.

The call finished with HRH The Duchess of Cambridge saying, "I'd love to come and visit at some point and see the families that you work with. Thank you for all the hard work you do on a day to day basis providing expert care to those in need. Happy nurses day to you all!"

To view the video call please Click here> <https://bit.ly/3x9mHX9> (AWC features after 3 minutes)

Donations & Visits to AWC



In **March 2020** Staff from Standard Chartered Bank delivered 54 care packages for our fistula patients and staff from Easy Solar donated 50 care packages for our new mothers. In **April 2020** local entrepreneur

Queenswear donated 100 locally made facemasks for the women and children in our care and The Lamin and Kadie Bah Foundation donated cloth face masks, evaporated milk, sugar and tea bags. We are always grateful for the support we receive.



The First Lady of Sierra Leone visits AWC

In **December 2020** we were very proud to welcome the First Lady of Sierra Leone to the Aberdeen

Women's Centre. The Maada and Fatima Bio Foundation provided Christmas give-aways for all patients and staff. The staff and patients appreciated the First Lady for her humility and for reaching out to them at a time when the world was struggling with a range of issues, including the Covid-19 pandemic



AWC features in Her Majesty the Queen's Christmas Day speech

On **Christmas Day** we were incredibly proud of our team at Aberdeen Women's Centre when they featured in Her Majesty the Queen's speech. As she looked back to International Nurses Day, our team could be seen during the video message they enjoyed with the Duchess of Cambridge and The Countess of Wessex.



Partnerships

We are grateful to all of our partners who enable us to provide medical services and support for the women and children in Africa. Thank you.



Thank you also to the local organisations and individual donors who supported us in 2020.

Financial Overview 2020

	Sierra Leone	Malawi	Madagascar
	£	£	£
Total Operating Cost	717,742	204,171	146,078
Funded by			
Gloag Foundation (1)	526,044	189,877	132,303
UNFPA (2)	72,579		
Aminata Maternal Foundation (3)	50,171		
Mercy Ships	51,936		
Freedom From Fistula USA	13,775	14,147	13,775
Other Partners	3,237	147	
TOTAL	717,742	204,171	146,078

1. Funding from the Gloag Foundation includes donations to Freedom From Fistula (UK) and any direct support to the projects.
2. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) provides a grant locally in Sierra Leone that partially finances the fistula operations.
3. Aminata Maternal Foundation provides funding support for the midwifery training, teenage maternity services and teenage support projects.

Operating costs were reduced in 2020 due to the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on providing our full services.

Gloag Foundation separately finances overheads, including fundraising costs, capital costs, administration and related expenditure.

Support us

We are grateful to all our supporters and partners, private individuals, charitable trusts, businesses, local and international aid agencies and government departments.

Here are some ideas of how you could help in the UK to meet the healthcare needs of women and children in Sierra Leone, Malawi and Madagascar:

Donate online

Donate via www.justgiving.com/freedomfromfistula. If you are a UK taxpayer, you can make your donation go further by selecting the Gift Aid option.

Make a regular donation

Please contact us at 01738 633 264 to request a standing order form, or email us at info@freedomfromfistula.org.uk

Organise a fund-raising event

For ideas, visit our website at www.freedomfromfistula.org.uk/support

Arrange a corporate sponsorship / donation

Nominate Freedom From Fistula as part of your company's Corporate Social Responsibility programme.

Leave a legacy

Leave a legacy by remembering Freedom From Fistula Foundation in your will.

Post a cheque

Freedom From Fistula, The Steading, Kinfauns, Perth, PH2 7JU

