



Fixing the Big Issues for Disabled People in Buckinghamshire

Charity No 1102511

www.buds.org.uk | 01494 211179 | info@buds.org.uk

*Registered Address (no callers): BuDS, c/o B P Collins LLP,
20 Station Road, Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, SL9 8EL*



Trustees' Annual Report for 2023-24

Chair's Foreword

1. Buckinghamshire Disability Service (BuDS) is a leading disability charity operating in and around Bucks and increasingly across England. It is an independent pan-disability organisation led by disabled people and committed to the social model of disability. Our visionary aim is to abolish disability by building a world which is Fair4All, free of the barriers which disable people. Our work helps build an inclusive world where disabled and non-disabled people have equal status and equal value opportunities to live their lives.
2. BuDS is evolving from a county charity to a national charity. This process began in 2020. Following approval from members in 2023, we intend to change our name to 'BuDS Disability Service' and to formally re-brand ourselves as a national charity, alongside moving to Charitable Incorporated Organisation status.
3. BuDS' mission is to remove the barriers which disable people, so that everyone has equality of opportunity and access. Removing these barriers is what BuDS' projects are intended to do in all areas of life. Our Disability Services help disabled people directly, while our Fair4All projects bring about permanent change to the built environment, structures, systems and infrastructure so that disabled people do not face barriers to living independently. Our Reach4Work projects help disabled jobseekers into work and education. All our work is evidence-based, project-led and responds to the real needs of disabled people. The expertise of our professional volunteers mean we can often punch above our weight.
4. Because Covid remains a real risk and huge barrier to inclusion for millions of disabled and clinically vulnerable people, BuDS is one of the few UK charities which continues to provide information, guidance and support around Covid issues. We have a deserved national reputation as a highly respected and reliable source of Covid information used by tens of thousands of people.
5. 2023-24 was marked by significant successes but also some serious challenges. Annual income grew by 56% and staff hours grew by 40%, but volunteer hours fell by a third and there was significant turnover of trustees, particularly those with relevant experience and skills. The overall pattern was of the strong growth of funded projects with staff and volunteer support, but purely voluntary-led projects struggled. If maintained, this trend may force major changes to how BuDS operates in future.
6. On behalf of the Board, I would like to express our sincere and wholehearted thanks to the Trustees, staff and volunteers who have given so much of their time and talents in 2023-24. I would also like to thank our funders who have shown such confidence in our work.

7. I hope you enjoy reading more about BuDS in this Annual Report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Clark', with a long horizontal stroke underneath.

Andrew Clark
Chair of Trustees

Introduction

9. This is the Annual Report for Buckinghamshire Disability Service (BuDS), charity registration number 1102511, for the financial year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, and includes the audited accounts for that period.
10. As BuDS' income is below £500,000 and it does not have assets worth more than £3.26 million, Trustees are not required to produce a full Annual Report according to the guidelines set out in the Statement of Recommended Practice (FRS 102).

What is BuDS?

11. Buckinghamshire Disability Service (BuDS) is a leading disability charity operating in and around Bucks and increasingly across England. It is an independent pan-disability organisation led by disabled people and committed to the social model of disability. Our visionary aim is to abolish disability by building a world which is Fair4All, free of the barriers which disable people. Our many projects help build an inclusive world where disabled and non-disabled people have equal status and equal value opportunities to live their lives.

User Led

12. BuDS is committed to being user-led, that is a charity which is primarily led by disabled Trustees and which seeks, as far as possible, to include primarily disabled people as staff and volunteers. We see being user-led as vital to our authenticity and mission. In practice, we aim to have 75% of Trustees who identify as disabled people and, as a minimum, 51%. In 2023-24, 77% of those holding office as Trustees identified as disabled people; while 51% of those volunteers who provided information and 25% of staff identified as disabled.

Social Model of Disability

13. BuDS follows and advocates for the social model of disability, which is at the core of our beliefs and work. The social model of disability states that disability is caused by the barriers which society puts in the way of people who have an impairment or medical condition, not by those impairments or conditions. Thus, for example, a wheelchair-user is 'disabled' by the lack of a ramp, not by their lack of mobility, or an autistic person is 'disabled' by a lack of quiet places rather than by their neurodivergence. When we use the phrase 'disabled person', we mean a person with an impairment or medical condition impacted by a barrier which disables them – we are not referring to any physical, sensory or mental health condition they may have.

A Voluntary Charity

14. BuDS aims to be an inclusive working community of mainly disabled volunteers organised around the key principle that disabled people themselves should tackle the issues and barriers that they face. Our disabled volunteers are also our members and part of our unique wider grassroots community of disabled people.
15. This model of a working community of mainly disabled volunteers has been significantly more difficult to sustain in 2023-24. Overall active volunteer numbers dropped from 117 in 2022-23 to 76 in 2023-24. The proportion of disabled volunteers also reduced from around three-quarters in 2022-23 to half in 2023-24. This decline in volunteering was in keeping with both local and national trends.
16. These changes are not unexpected. 2023-24 has seen severe economic pressure and an accelerating cost-of-living crisis, affecting disabled people most of all. Many of our disabled volunteers have had to give up volunteering in order to work extra hours or to enter employment,

and the same pressures prevent many disabled people from starting to volunteer. Many of our former volunteers also have increased caring responsibilities because statutory services such as SEND education, the NHS, and care services continue to decline.

17. Trustees recognise that our aim to be an inclusive working community of mainly disabled volunteers may no longer be realistic or sustainable, and this strategic model therefore will be reviewed in 2024-25.
18. In 2023-24, we recruited 21 new volunteers to maintain an active volunteer number of 76 over the year. We have a part-time volunteer coordinator responsible for recruitment and induction. Training is available for all volunteers and many volunteers also have a mentor for 1:1 support. We have a dedicated in-house welfare team, Help for Helpers. Many of our volunteers are job seekers and we support them towards work through our Reach4Work project (details below).
19. Usage data from our IT system (Microsoft Office 365), shows that, over 2023-24, BuDS had an average of 30 active volunteers working on any particular day, from a pool of active volunteers of around 75 individuals. This represents a significant decrease of around a third from 2022-23, when BuDS had an average of 48-50 active volunteers working on any particular day, from a pool of active volunteers of around 120 individuals.
20. We calculate that our 76 active volunteers worked a total of 18,240 hours in 2023-24, an average of roughly 4.6 hours/week per volunteer. (In 2022-23, 117 volunteers worked 40,820 hours, an average of 6.7 hours/week each). This represents the same hours as 8 full time staff, representing a financial contribution in kind of around £260,000 per annum.

A Youth Charity

21. BuDS remains a significant youth charity, with 13% of volunteers aged under 25 in 2023-24. We have a Trustee aged under 25 who specifically represents disabled young people. Around 70% of BuDS' work benefits young people.

Independent & Party Politically Neutral

22. BuDS is an independent charity which can speak up for the interests of disabled people without fear or favour, untrammelled by ties arising from contracts, funding or unequal partnerships. Our strategy specifically requires all funding to be examined to ensure that it does not place unacceptable constraints on our independence and freedom to act. Often, BuDS acts as the spokesperson for other organisations that cannot speak out without fear of jeopardising contracts or financial relationships on which their charity depends.
23. As required by charity law, BuDS is scrupulously party-politically neutral. In accordance with Charity Commission guidance, whilst BuDS reserves the right to be critical of public bodies or the Government, we take great care never to express any party-political views or to create in the mind of a reasonable onlooker the idea that the charity is biased in favour of any particular political party.

A Values-Led Charity

24. BuDS has adopted strong values which underpin all of our work and the way we behave. These can be found on our website.

Charity Objects

25. The objects of BuDS, as set out in the Constitution, are: "To relieve the needs of disabled people, their families, and carers, principally within the County of Buckinghamshire excluding

Milton Keynes, by any charitable means and in particular, but not exclusively by (1) providing education services, and (2) providing advisory and support services”.

26. The 2023 AGM approved a change to the objects of the charity so that the legal area of operation of BuDS becomes ‘England’, rather than ‘the County of Buckinghamshire excluding Milton Keynes’. As of the time of publication, this change has yet to be formally approved by the Charity Commission.
27. The Trustees review the charity objects annually, having regard to the Charity Commission’s public benefit guidance, and remain of the view that the objects of the charity continue to meet the public benefit requirement set out in the Charities Acts 2005 and 2011.

Public Benefit of the Charity

28. In accordance with the Charities Acts, the BuDS’ trustees can confirm that they are aware of the Charity Commission’s public benefit guidance, have had regard to it when exercising any relevant powers or duties, and have complied with the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 by including this statement in this annual report. The Trustees do not feel they have departed from the guidance to any extent.
29. The BuDS Trustees, having had regard to the Charity Commission’s public benefit guidance, can confirm that they have operated BuDS in a way that carries out its charitable purposes for the public benefit. Further details can be found in the following sections of this annual report.

Behind the Scenes

30. BuDS has a clear strategic planning process as follows:
 - a. A formal written Strategy and Strategic Plan document is produced annually by the charity’s executive trustees and agreed by the Full Board including non-executive Trustees.
 - b. The Strategy and Plan include formal reporting mechanisms by which Trustees can monitor progress and ensure the charity remains true to its core values.
 - c. Progress towards achieving the Strategy and Plan is reviewed formally biannually by a full Trustee meeting, which includes non-executive Trustees. The same meeting also reviews formally whether the charity has remained true to its values.
 - d. Amendments to the Strategy and Plan are made and agreed by the full Trustee Board as necessary, alongside any actions needed to address departures from core values.
31. The Full Trustee Board met on 15 July 2023 and 6 January 2024 to carry out a strategic review and agree a revised strategy. This is explained further in paragraph 95 below.

Charity Structure, Governance and Management

32. BuDS is an unincorporated association in the form of a membership charity. Members elect the officers and Trustees, and key decisions are taken by a General Meeting. The governing document is a written constitution.
33. The 2023 AGM approved the formation of a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) which will take over the assets of the unincorporated association in due course.

Constitution

34. The BuDS constitution was adopted on 11 March 2003 and amended by the Annual General Meeting in 2010, 2012 and 2021. It is available on the website.

Membership

35. Currently, membership of BuDS is only open to all disabled people living in Buckinghamshire or who have a direct interest in Buckinghamshire. A disabled person for the purposes of membership means being disabled within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010 or otherwise having direct personal experience of disability. Until 20 November 2021, carers of disabled people were also entitled to become members of BuDS although in practice none did so.
36. In practice, BuDS deems all circa 45,000 disabled people in Buckinghamshire to be de facto members of the charity and seeks through its normal activities to remain in close contact with their views and opinions. The charity does not maintain a formal membership register or have a formal membership process except in relation to Trustees (see below) and for attendees at the AGM. Attendees at the AGM are required to certify that they are eligible for membership before their voting rights are recognised.
37. The 2023 AGM approved a change to the constitution so that all disabled people resident in England would be eligible to be members of BuDS. At the time of publication, the Charity Commission has not formally approved this change. It is expected that the change of status to that of a CIO will also affect membership of BuDS.

Trustees

38. The BuDS constitution provides that there shall be a minimum of four and a maximum of 15 Trustees, co-opted or appointed by the AGM from the membership of the charity. These are the three officers of the charity (Chair, Secretary and Treasurer) plus up to twelve others. The constitution requires Trustees to step down after three years in office (although they may be re-elected), but BuDS' practice since 2009 is to elect or re-elect Trustees every year. No organisation has the right to nominate a Trustee.
39. As a user-led activist charity, the role of BuDS Trustees in 2023-24 was different from that in many other charities. As a charity, we are by policy strongly Trustee-led. It is inherent in our status as a user-led organisation that the BuDS Trustee Board is the clear leadership and direction setting body for the charity. Accordingly, we expect and require all Trustees to have a strong commitment to our values and objectives, and for Trustees to play an active role in the life of the charity.
40. During 2023-24, 13 individuals held office as Trustees, with the average size of the Trustee Board being 8 people.
41. During 2023-24, two Trustees were related. The quorum for decision-making was increased accordingly and a Related Trustees policy was introduced. This policy can be found on the BuDS website.
42. The BuDS Trustee Board is clearly structured. Trustees have two main roles:
 - a. Officers & Executive Trustees – these play an active day-to-day leadership role in the charity as decision-makers and through contributing their skills and experience. During 2023-24, seven individuals held office as officers or executive Trustees (six disabled).
 - b. Non-Executive Trustees – these Trustees are chosen for their wider experience and skills, including lived experience as a disabled person. They do not play a day-to-day role in the charity but contribute their wisdom at Full Board meetings at which strategy and progress are reviewed, and as needed when key decisions are being taken. During 2023-24, six individuals held office as non-executive Trustees (four disabled).
43. Reflecting their active role, officers and executive trustees met online at least monthly during 2023-24. Trustees met formally seven times in 2023-24. There were two formal Full Board

meetings with the attendance of non-executive Trustees. There was also a busy virtual Trustee team for discussions between meetings.

44. Trustees are identified by open advertisement, by canvassing existing volunteers, or direct approaches by the Trustee Board. In 2023-2024, eight potential new Trustees were identified of which three were appointed. The selection procedure is as follows:
 - a. Membership eligibility is confirmed
 - b. Safeguarding, reference and an enhanced DBS check are completed
 - c. Individuals are invited to attend three Trustee meetings and to become involved in BuDS work and projects over that period
 - d. The Board then decides whether to second the individual to the Trustee Board until the next AGM
 - e. At the next AGM, the individual is invited to say whether they wish to have their name put forward for election

Succession Planning

45. 2023-24 was a demanding year for BuDS and this was reflected in an unusually high number of resignations from the Trustee board. 6 Trustees resigned during the year, including the Treasurer, and it was sadly found necessary to suspend 1 trustee prior to their term of office ending in January 2024. This degree of turnover made succession planning a high priority for the Board.
46. A Succession Plan to prepare for the planned stepping-down of the BuDS' longstanding Chair, Andrew Clark, was in force during 2023. This plan entailed the recruitment of two Vice-Chairs prior to the recruitment of a new Chair, to ensure good continuity and to ensure that key skills and experience were not lost. However, during 2023-24, both the Treasurer and Secretary trustee roles became vacant, and focus switched to filling those roles. A new Succession Plan was agreed in January 2024.

Organisation & Management of the Charity

47. In 2023-24, BuDS was organised as a working community of volunteers, supported by staff, who collaborate together on projects. Since 2020, BuDS has been structured according to Agile project management principles, to maximise output, flexibility and responsiveness whilst enabling best practice project, cost and risk management. A structure chart can be found on the website
48. The basic building unit of the charity is the project team. This is a group of Trustees and/or volunteers working together around a common theme, goal or idea. The project team is structured and will have members in different defined roles including that of project coordinator. Paid staff may be deployed to support the team, but BuDS does not have enough staff to support all teams.
49. Projects are grouped together into one of 4 departments: Disability Services, Fair4All, Reach4Work or Housekeeping. These departments are explained further below.
50. During 2023-24, all team members worked from home using Microsoft Teams as a virtual office, including video meetings, messaging, task boards, wikis, forms, etc. Each project has objectives agreed by Trustees and progress is monitored at Trustee meetings through the Project Manager or executive Trustee for that project. The typical working process is that of the 'sprint' – a sustained team effort to achieve a piece of work or outcome - followed by a reflective pause to evaluate success and plan next steps.

51. In January 2023, BuDS had 19 active project teams (including 3 sub-projects), and 10 teams dealing with 'housekeeping' or corporate issues such as communications, finances, fundraising, HR, etc. One active project team was closed during the year and a number of projects became dormant.
52. Janneke Elford remained the BuDS Projects Manager throughout 2023-24, responsible for the 19 active project teams in the Disability Services, Fair4All, and Reach4Work departments. Housekeeping teams remained under direct Trustee management throughout 2023-24, but the Project Manager's involvement in housekeeping projects was increased as part of the planned evolution of that role toward that of a Chief Officer.

Staffing

53. BuDS is an overwhelmingly voluntary charity and, in 2023-24, the role of our paid staff is primarily to support volunteers to achieve their project goals. All staff are on short-notice contracts reflecting the funding currently available to BuDS.
54. During 2023-24, BuDS had an average of eight staff in post (4.4 FTE), compared to eight staff (3 FTE) in 2022-23. This represented a 40% increase in staff time available to the charity.
55. BuDS aims to be an inclusive employer, and we are proud that 25% of individuals employed during 2023-24 identified as disabled people. Reflecting our ethos and insight into the barriers preventing disabled people from working, we offer all staff flexible working hours alongside remote working from home. We also offer 'disability leave' and shape working patterns and routines around staff needs as disabled people. This policy has been highly successful in motivating and retaining staff, not just those who are disabled.

Safeguarding & Welfare

56. Safeguarding is exceptionally important to BuDS. All Trustees, staff and volunteers, other than short-term temporary roles, are fully safeguarded including the taking up of references and an enhanced DBS check. There is mandatory safeguarding training, delivered inhouse, for all staff and volunteers. As an online organisation, our IT system has been configured to enhance safeguarding. We are linked to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and able to make direct referrals to them if needed.
57. The welfare and safety of the BuDS community is also important. Many of our volunteers and staff are potentially vulnerable and our 'Help for Helpers' welfare team is available to anyone needing a chat or word of advice. During 2023-24, a significant number of welfare concerns relating to volunteers were resolved.
58. Safeguarding and Welfare is managed by a safeguarding sub-committee of the Trustee Board which throughout most of 2023-24 included three professionally trained (Level 3) safeguarding officers.

Diversity & Inclusion

59. The Trustees are committed to intersectional diversity across the charity. We aim to be an inclusive community where everyone can find a place and fulfil their wishes without discrimination, and we are proud to have many LGBTQ+ people among our number. A Trustee with lead responsibility for intersectional diversity across the charity was in post in 2023-24. The BuDS Trustee Board is significantly more intersectionally diverse than most charity boards.

BuDS Work in 2023-24

Overview

60. 2023-24 saw a mixed picture. Annual income grew by 56% compared to 2022-23 (from £99k to £155k) and staff hours grew by 40%, but volunteer hours fell by a third and there was significant turnover of trustees, particularly those with relevant experience and skills. The overall pattern was of the development and growth of funded projects with staff support, but a decline in purely voluntary-led projects. Some volunteer-led projects had to be mothballed primarily through shortage of the volunteers who had previously sustained them, despite high demand.

BuDS Structure

61. BuDS has four departments: Disability Services, Fair4All, Reach4Work, and Housekeeping. Each department contained a number of related projects which were led by staff or volunteers.

Disability Services

62. The Disability Services group of projects were those directly helping and empowering disabled individuals in Buckinghamshire and beyond.

Enquiries Service

63. The BuDS Enquiries Service answered questions and supported disabled adults and young people (plus carers and parents) on any disability-related issue or topic, filling gaps that other services could not provide. The Enquiries Service does not duplicate services available elsewhere, such as CAB. Rather, it acts as a safety net, picking up clients, questions and issues which other agencies cannot, or do not have resources, to address. Importantly, it can offer long-term support with complex issues and work with disabled people who find it hard to access other services. Typical queries include housing, utilities, benefits (PIP, ESA, DLA and Universal Credit), accessibility, disability law, equality, work and employment, education and schools, and Covid.
64. With only a relatively small amount of funding for this project, it is mainly volunteer-led and run. With other enquiries services under immense strain, 515 enquiries were received during the year (10 per week), of which only 11% were closed. Securing additional funding to expand the Enquiries Service is a high priority for 2024-25.
65. The Enquiries Service was generously funded in 2023-24 by small grants from B P Collins LLP (via Heart of Bucks), the Matrix Causes Fund and The Rothschild Foundation.

BuDDies

66. BuDDies is a fully safeguarded, professionally managed, but sadly now small-scale specialist befriending service for disabled people. It is one of only a few voluntary schemes supporting people with complex mental health conditions and able to offer long-term support to people who need it. Set up in 2020 as an emergency response to Covid-19 lockdowns, BuDDies in 2023-24 continued to be a lifeline for lonely or isolated disabled people. BuDS BuDDys (as the befrienders are called) are highly skilled and trained volunteers and the nature of the people supported by BuDDies means that significant welfare, safeguarding and peer-support is needed to keep the service sustainable and safe.
67. Demand for BuDDies in 2023-24 was once again significantly greater than the capacity of the service, with frequent referrals from NHS mental health services and community prescribers, and there is a long waiting list. Sadly, a number of volunteer befrienders had to leave in 2023-

- 24, reducing the support that could be offered. Securing additional funding to expand the Enquiries Service is a high priority for 2024-25.
68. During 2023-24, around 208 hours of support were provided to four disabled people by four volunteer 'BuDDy' befrienders. This was a reduction of over half compared to 2022-23.
 69. BuDDies was generously part-funded in 2023-24 by The Rothschild Foundation.

Covid Information, Advice, and Guidance

70. The BuDS Covid IAG project continued in 2023-24 to support disabled and clinically-vulnerable people in Buckinghamshire and nationally with information, advice and guidance about Covid. Covid largely ceased to be an issue for most people in this period, with no precautions taken against the spread of the virus and a general feeling that the world was now 'post-pandemic'. Increasingly, NHS and statistical data about both the virus and its health consequences were deliberately not collected. However, ignoring Covid continued not to be an option for millions of disabled and clinically vulnerable people, for whom infection had serious consequences. The number of people with Covid-related disability or long-term consequences continued to rise and huge waves of acute illness swept the country in autumn 2023 and again in winter 2023-24.
71. Over 2023-24, BuDS maintained its national reputation as a highly respected and reliable source of Covid information used weekly by tens of thousands of people, presenting information in written, video, infographic and easy read formats. Our weekly risk assessments gained international status. We published 6 articles and 33 risk assessments, which together generated well over 200,000 engagements on social media. Our own support community group on Facebook maintained its membership of around 450.
72. Covid remained a politically controversial topic and, operating within policies agreed by the entire Trustee Board, great care was taken to never express any party-political views and for BuDS to remain scrupulously party-politically neutral.
73. In 2023-24, the Covid IAG project was once again funded internally from unrestricted funds.

Fair4All

74. Fair4All is a BuDS 'brand' for our projects aiming to build an inclusive world which is free of the barriers which disable people: a Fair4All world in which disability is effectively abolished. All of these projects saw a welcome development and expansion in 2023-24.

Fair4All Attitudes and Hate Crime

75. BuDS continued until December 2023 to operate a disability hate 'Support & Report Service'. This service, developed with Thames Valley Police and the Bucks Safety Partnership, provided victims of disability hate with friendly, knowledgeable support to report crimes and incidents, and to get long-term compassionate and understanding emotional support. It was the referral point for all local disability hate incidents reported through the National Hate Crime Helpline.
76. Sadly, it proved impossible to maintain this important service beyond the end of funding. The project remains dormant until new funding can be found.

Fair4All Card Scheme

77. The Fair4All Card is an innovative and discreet secure photocard which provides disabled people with definitive proof of their legal status as a disabled person and lists the 'reasonable adjustments' the holder is legally entitled to expect from shops, services and individuals in the community. A substantial four-year development grant from The National Lottery's Reaching Communities Fund was received in August 2023, allowing a major expansion of the scheme to commence.

78. By March 2024, new staff had been recruited for the project and a new online portal for disabled people to use to apply for the Fair4All Card, and a new scheme website, were both well on the way to delivery. A new volunteer team had been recruited and were being trained to process card applications. However, the original plan to roll out cards with the support of third-party disability organisations has had to be reconsidered, despite extensive concept testing. All disability organisations are now under such pressure that supporting the Card scheme, however much they wish to do so in principle, is no longer practical for them.

Fair4All Education

79. The Fair4All Education project promotes the interests of disabled children and young people (SEND students) in the education system. This project has had mixed fortunes in 2023-24.
80. A significant expert working community, including SEND professionals, parents and disabled young people, had been assembled to advocate and establish new projects. Sadly, with the increasing demands of the failing SEND education system on professionals, parents and carers, fewer people found it possible to volunteer their time and this aspect of the project had to become dormant.
81. A major research project into educational and work transitions for disabled children and young people in Bucks has however continued to make excellent progress with the very generous support of The Rothschild Foundation, with a report expected in 2024-25.

Fair4All Events

82. BuDS is committed to making large public events more accessible and inclusive for all disabled people, and has Buckinghamshire's only stock of accessible and inclusive children's games and activities.
83. Our highly successful Fair4All Events project continued in the summer of 2023, albeit on a smaller scale, with only one major public event supported, the Towersey Festival in Buckingham in August 2023. Lack of volunteers was the major factor holding back the project: over 35 events could have been supported with more funding and volunteers.
84. In 2023-24, Fair4All Events was generously part-funded by a small grant from The Clare Foundation.

Fair4All Public Spaces

85. BuDS has a long history of successfully supporting councils, developers and others to make public spaces more accessible and inclusive for disabled people. In 2022-23, we launched two consultancy arms for this project, Fair4All Visitor and Fair4All Access & Inclusion Surveys. Funding for Fair4All Visitor, although highly successful, ended in 2023-24 and the project was mothballed until further funding can be found. Similarly, although four access and inclusion surveys were carried out for three Chiltern Society open green spaces and one for Amersham Museum in 2023, demand for paid access consultancy has proved to be low and the A&I Access Surveys have also been mothballed for the time being.

Fair4All Services

86. BuDS has always worked to improve council, NHS and private-sector services for disabled people in Buckinghamshire. Fair4All Services is the only independent disabled-led monitoring and campaigning group in Buckinghamshire. However, it is entirely volunteer-led, and recruiting volunteers with the time and skills to deliver the project goal has proven impossible in 2023-24. With very considerable regret, this project was mothballed, although the intent to revive it is strong.

Reach4Work

BucksWorkability

87. The BucksWorkability Partnership, which BuDS supported, brought together the NHS, DWP and 39 CVS disability employment schemes in the public, voluntary and private sectors. However, in 2023 the DWP started to build up its own disability employment networks and participation in BucksWorkability fell accordingly. The project is now mothballed pending national changes to disability employability schemes which may reinvigorate it.

Reach4Work

88. Since 2010, BuDS has helped its volunteers towards work. Our Reach4Work project, created in 2018, codified and developed that help, creating a professional wrap-around service for our disabled volunteers who want to move into or closer to work. The key elements of Reach4Work are:

- a. BuDS provides a supportive, inclusive and caring community which provides exceptional emotional and peer support to disabled jobseekers. When a disabled jobseeker joins BuDS, they are not merely a client or service-user but a member of the charity, a full participant in our wider working community.
- b. The volunteer role which job seekers have within a BuDS project is bespoke and structured to provide the experience, skills and networking which the individual jobseeker needs – it is a ‘real unpaid job’ created for the benefit of both the charity and the jobseeker, with highly supportive staff and volunteer support.
- c. Reach4Work provides disabled jobseekers with professional employment support elements such as training, mentoring, interview and CV skills, job placements, etc
- d. Jobseekers are brought into contact with local employers who are already being helped to create inclusive workplaces and opportunities for disabled workers.

89. Unsurprisingly, BuDS is exceptionally successful at moving disabled jobseeker volunteers into or closer to work. Typically, 95% of participants report positive progress towards work and around a third of our disabled job seeker volunteers move into work or vocational training within a year of starting with BuDS.

90. Pandemic recovery funding for the Reach4Work project came to an end in April 2023 and, with the loss of paid staff, the number of R4W places was reduced accordingly. However, a further grant was received from the National Lottery in January 2024 and the scheme expanded again. Further funding was received from The Rothschild Foundation.

Reach4Work Digital

91. This project is unique to BuDS and helps disabled young people gain key skills and experience to get jobs in the digital sector. The team employs Agile methodology, which is widely used in the digital sector. The project has built close links with local technology and IT employers. It is run entirely by disabled young people, with some staff support, and has delivered high quality products to industry standards, including phone apps, online databases and websites.

92. While Reach4Work Digital continued successfully in 2023-24, it was not possible to secure sufficient funding, as we had hoped, to launch a second Digital Team. The Reach4Work Digital project was generously part-funded in 2023-24 by small grants from The Shanly Foundation and The Rothschild Foundation.

Reach4Work Work Experience

93. This project provides disabled university and college students with high quality work experience and has been extremely popular and successful in the past. However, lack of funding meant that the project remained dormant in 2023-24.

Comms, Website and Creative

94. In 2023-24, BuDS maintained four websites and twelve social media channels to communicate with the public, its supporters and disabled people across Buckinghamshire and the UK. These were all maintained and developed by disabled staff and volunteer members of the very busy Communications, Websites and Creative teams.

Plans for 2024-25

95. BuDS' detailed plans for 2024-25 are set out in its strategy agreed in January 2024, available on the website.

96. BuDS has an unparalleled insight into the circumstances of disabled people. It has a proven capacity to use that knowledge to generate and design projects which support disabled people in innovative and effective ways. These projects are attractive to funders. The key issue, therefore, is the need to ensure that BuDS can deliver projects when funding and other resources allow. 2024-25 will therefore see a focus on stronger project delivery and management resources and more robust financial systems appropriate to a fast-growing charity.

97. BuDS has historically relied primarily on volunteers to run its projects and activities for over a decade. The dramatic fall in volunteer numbers in 2023-24 has highlighted the vulnerability of this reliance and Trustees will seek in 2024-25 to address how an alternative model can be created and sustained.

98. Trustees have also identified the need to reform and refresh BuDS governance to reflect its larger size and developing capacity. The resignations from the Trustee Board over 2023-24 have sadly reduced its expertise and resilience, and there is a long-standing need to make an effective succession plan for the departure of the Chair. However, recruiting Trustees with the relevant skills and experience has proven extremely difficult and perhaps impossible while the pool of recruits is limited to disabled people living in Bucks. Recruiting trustees with a professional background to an unincorporated society adds to the difficulty.

99. This situation highlights the critical importance of constitutional evolution, to make BuDS a national charity in the form of a CIO, as a preliminary to restoring the strength of the Trustee Board. Recruiting officers and trustees of the required quality will only be sustainable if recruiting from the whole of England and to a limited liability charity.

Achievements and Performance

Achievements

100. The following table summarises the difference that each of our projects made to the lives of its beneficiaries:

Project and if unique in Bucks	Difference to Beneficiaries
Enquiries (unique)	Answered questions and offered advocacy support to disabled people which they could not obtain elsewhere

BuDDies	Befriended and supported lonely and isolated disabled and clinically vulnerable people
Covid-19 (unique)	Information, advice, guidance and analysis about Covid-19 for disabled and clinically vulnerable people, including a weekly risk assessment
Fair4All Card (unique)	Helped disabled people get the help and support that they are legally entitled to in shops and public places
Fair4All Services	Dormant
Fair4All Attitudes & Hate Crime (unique)	Dormant
Hate Crime Support & Report Service	Dormant
Fair4All Education	Dormant
SEND Transitions Service (unique)	Researched and analysed SEND and work transitions for disabled children and young people and captured the authentic voice of disabled children and young people.
Fair4All Events (unique)	Helped make large public events more accessible and inclusive for all disabled and clinically vulnerable people and educated event organisers
Fair4All Public Spaces	Dormant
Fair4All Visitor (unique)	Dormant
Fair4All Access & Inclusion Surveys	Offered a unique holistic access and inclusion survey to businesses and organisations to help them be more accessible and inclusive for disabled people
Reach4Work – General	Supported disabled BuDS volunteers who are jobseekers towards or into work
Reach4Work – Digital (unique)	Trains and develops disabled young people for careers in the digital industry
Reach4Work – Work Experience	Dormant
BucksWorkability	Dormant
Housekeeping Projects	Allowed disabled people to volunteer in vocational roles which helped move them towards work

Cost Effectiveness

101. BuDS aims to be a highly cost-effective and efficient charity. Gifts in kind and the value of voluntary and pro bono support in 2023-24 amounted to circa £291,000, or £1.88 for every pound raised by BuDS. The principal ways in which this support was obtained are as follows:

- a. 76 active volunteers worked a total of 18,240 hours in 2023-24, an average of roughly 4.6 hours/week per volunteer. This represents the same hours as 8 full time staff, representing a financial contribution in kind of around £260,000 per annum.
- b. IT and software donations, including 143 Microsoft Office 365 licences, representing a financial contribution in kind of £10,000.
- c. Inhouse design and media production by volunteers saved an estimated £18,000
- d. Pro bono professional legal and accountancy support saved an estimated £3,000

102. BuDS would like to thank all the businesses which have supported us, including Microsoft UK Ltd, CloudyIT Ltd, B P Collins LLP and Seymour Taylor Limited.

Fundraising Activities

103. BuDS expenditure on fundraising activities in 2023-24, principally the salaries of two part-time grants fundraisers, was £11,969, and income generated as a result of this activity was £152,904. This represents a return of £12.77 on every pound invested in fundraising.

Financial Review for FY 2023-24

104. Financial year 2023-24 saw a 56% increase in BuDS' income compared to 2022-23, because of successful grant fundraising. An important development was the award by the Lloyds Foundation of an unrestricted core cost grant of £75,000 over 3 years as part of their support for disability user-led organisations. Voluntary fundraising in the form of donations was very small, reflecting both the austere economic circumstances and the difficulty of raising funds from our supporter base of primarily disabled people.

Reserves Policy

105. The formal Reserves Policy for financial year 2023-24 remained unchanged, i.e. to hold a balance in reserve adequate to cover all legal or employment liabilities and three month's unavoidable (fixed) running costs. This total was calculated at £2000 and held largely in the charity's legacy Cooperative Bank account. This reserves policy will be reviewed annually.

Charity as a Going Concern

106. Like most charities without a significant standing endowment, BuDS relies on attracting a constant flow of grant and fundraising income to sustain its activities. This exposes the charity to a running risk of future financial deficits which, if unmitigated, could cause the charity to become insolvent or fail as a going concern. Trustees have taken steps to mitigate this risk as follows:

- a. The charity treasurer is a qualified accountant and is charged specifically with warning the Board about any financial risk which may occur.
- b. A qualified grants fundraiser is employed to generate a constant flow of grant applications, and a fundraising team is being developed to boost voluntary giving
- c. A current budget and cash flow is examined at every monthly Trustee meeting and a forward plan is formulated at each Full Trustee meeting. This transparent planning enables all members of the Board to evaluate future risks and to raise concerns at the earliest opportunity
- d. A strategic plan is in place which would allow the charity to contract to a size which would be sustainable long-term *without* major grant funding. All contracts, including employment contracts, can be terminated with short notice if funding was to fall significantly.
- e. Employment and service contracts are specifically examined so as to minimise longer-term financial liabilities. The charity had no significant longer-term financial liabilities such as pensions or property leases in 2023-24. There is a small redundancy liability for one employee.

107. As a consequence of the mitigations mentioned above, as of April 2024, Trustees had no concerns about the charity's ability to remain financially viable and a going concern for the foreseeable future.

Principal sources of funds

108. In 2021/22, BuDS' principal sources of funding in order of size were as below. This information is from BuDS' management accounts and is not a complete account of all income received. Smaller grants (below £3000) were also received.

Source	Type	Amount
The Rothschild Foundation	Restricted grant for Education (3 year) and other projects with FCR element.	£28,667
The Clare Foundation	Restricted grant for Events (3 year)	£3300
Matrix Causes Fund	Restricted grant for Enquiries (3 year)	£3000
National Lottery	Restricted grant for Reach4Work (1 year) with FCR element	£19,982
National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund	Restricted grant for Fair4All Card (3 years) with FCR element.	£71,000
Lloyds Foundation	Unrestricted core costs	£25,000

Investment Policy

109. BuDS has no investment funds and therefore no investment policy. One will be adopted if needed in the future.

Principal risks facing the charity

110. The principal risks facing the charity, and the mitigations in place for them, are as follows:

Risk Type	Mitigation	Assessment
Structural Risks	BuDS has an appropriate legal form, registered with the Charity Commission and is in good governance, maintaining membership of NCVO and the Fundraising Regulator. Trustee Liability insurance is in place. Approval is in place for the charity to take the form of a CIO and Trustees are moving ahead with this change in 2024-25.	All significant risks are satisfactorily mitigated
Trustee-related Risks	The size and composition of the Trustee Board is actively managed to ensure a broad range of appropriate skills, and Trustee training is delivered. Good governance is maintained in the forms of transparent evidence-based decision-making at frequent well-attended meetings.	All significant risks are satisfactorily mitigated
Conflicts of Interest	The size and composition of the Trustee Board is actively managed to avoid conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest are transparently managed by Trustees without a conflict, eg relating to the employment of family members of Trustees. A related Trustee policy is in place.	All significant risks are satisfactorily mitigated
Safeguarding Risks	Safeguarding policies and practices are in place, and safeguarding is actively managed across the charity by a dedicated Trustee sub-committee which includes trained safeguarding personnel. Safeguarding incidents are managed appropriately and links to the MASH hub used as necessary.	All significant risks are satisfactorily mitigated

Contractual Risks	All significant contracts are subject to legal advice and Trustee approval. Professional liability insurance cover is in place for all activities.	All significant risks are satisfactorily mitigated
Staff-related Risks	A qualified HR professional is in post and appropriate staffing policies are in place. Appropriate employment-related insurance is in place and regularly reviewed. The Senior Management Team manages staffing issues. Staffing decisions which might give rise to liability (e.g. disciplinary actions) are managed by HR professional with external lawyers input as needed.	All significant risks are satisfactorily mitigated
Financial Risks	See above	All significant risks are satisfactorily mitigated
Reputational Risks	The Senior Management Team and Trustee Board actively manages all reputational risks, and appropriate editorial processes and policies are in place including designated spokespeople and restrictions on social media use. Defamation and litigation liability insurance cover is in place for all activities.	All significant risks are satisfactorily mitigated
Compliance Risks	The charity has few activities which are subject to formal accreditation or compliance regimes, but Senior Management Team actively manages compliance issues, and all significant contracts are subject to legal advice and Trustee approval. Professional liability insurance cover is in place for all activities. Where a new activity raises a compliance risk, this is assessed and mitigated before commencement	All significant risks are satisfactorily mitigated
Legal Risks	The Senior Management Team and Trustee Board actively manages all legal risks, and appropriate processes and policies are in place to mitigate a legal liability including formal approval processes and staff training. Public and professional insurance cover is in place for all activities. The charity has a retained legal advisor, a leading local practice.	All significant risks are satisfactorily mitigated

Reference and Administrative details

Charity name: Buckinghamshire Disability Service (BuDS)

Other name the charity uses: BuDS

Registered charity number: 1102511

Charity's principal address: Buckinghamshire Disability Service, c/o B P Collins LLP, Collins House, 20 Station Road, Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, SL9 8EL


Advisors

Type of advisor	Name	Address
Accountant	Tearle & Carver	Chandos House, School Lane, Buckingham, MK18 1HD
Solicitor	B P Collins LLP	B P Collins LLP, Collins House, 20 Station Road, Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, SL9 8EL

Declaration

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

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees:

Signature(s)		
Full name(s)	Andrew Clark	Sue Sansom
Position (eg Secretary, Chair, etc)	Chair of Trustees	Executive Trustee
Date	20/01/2025	20/01/2025