



Annual Report 2020

Stepping Stones Learning and Leisure
Registered charity: 1174850



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Introduction

Stepping Stones Learning and Leisure is a charity that provides meaningful and worthwhile activities for adults with learning disabilities. We deliver a weekly programme of activities including art, drama, dance, music and cooking.

2020 was a year like no other and the impact on our charity cannot be overstated. This annual report offers the opportunity to reflect upon the challenges we faced and the experiences we shared as we found ways to stay connected.

Our main aim during the year has been to emulate the resilience and spirit of our wonderful students and continue to deliver our classes with innovation, care and good humour. That we have succeeded in continuing to provide a much needed service, and learnt a lot to help us develop in the future, is down to our brilliant staff who have just kept going. We know that meeting face to face is best for some our students and re-connecting with them is a priority.

A massive debt of gratitude is due to our hosts, funders and supporters. Your faith in us meant that we could weather this strange year confidently and look forward enthusiastically. Thank you.

Several trustees, who have given many years of service to Stepping Stones, have decided to pass on the baton. I, as the new Chair, together with all trustees, will ensure that Stepping Stones is as committed as ever to providing creative and educational opportunities to people living with learning disability in our community.

Lynn Bransby
Chair of Trustees

An overview of 2020

During late February and early March, we followed the COVID 19 developments with increasing concern, particularly given that many of our users are vulnerable. On 13th March we made the difficult decision to stop running our classes. Just weeks later, the UK went into the first nationwide lockdown.

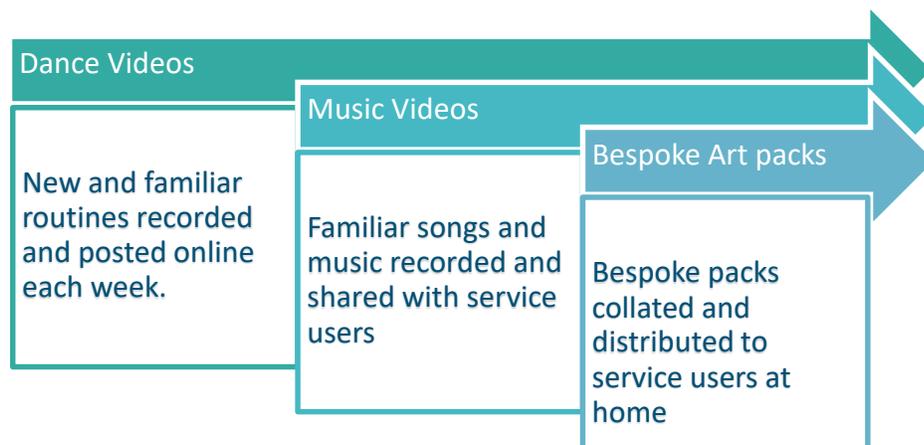
Reaching out and researching

As soon as we closed services we started contacting service users to understand what access they had to online activities, what sorts of activities would be of interest, and we also looked at what capacity we had as a team to deliver activities remotely. Prior to this date we had never delivered any activities online, and we knew very little about what access our service users would have.

Just over 50% of service users expressed an interest in taking part in online or remote activities. At this time residential care settings were facing tremendous pressure so we were clear that any activities we provided had to add value without adding to workload for care staff.

Stepping Stones Connect

We worked closely with our tutors to understand what might be possible and were very fortunate to receive the support and expertise of two video editors who donated their time to support us. In April 2020 we were able to launch a new online and remote offering. Our initial aim was to provide reassurance and familiarity to our service users in the most accessible way. We created videos and resource packs to enable service users to take part in weekly activities at the most convenient time to them.



We were able to reach about 40% of our service users with these forms of delivery. 60% of service users did not engage because of the suitability of activities or lack of access to equipment. This was particularly evident with service users who had profound disabilities or complex needs and who were generally not able to participate in online activities.

Live activities

As digital confidence grew for all of us, we tried some live online sessions towards the end of the term in July. As well as being a wonderful opportunity for friends from classes to see each other again, it was a test for us to see what might be possible in the future. These trial sessions informed our plans for September onwards as we saw first-hand the importance of real-time connection, shared experience and sense of community that has been the foundation of Stepping Stones.



Autumn delivery

Building on the success of our trial live classes we launched the Autumn term with regular live online dance and music classes. The timetable expanded over the term as we were able to support more people to take part. We also secured additional funding to develop a digital exclusion project to enable us to support service users who had so far been unable to engage with our digital offerings.

We were delighted to be able to replicate the familiar structure of Stepping Stones with regular weekly classes, bringing together the same group of people for each session. As we gained experience with the format, we were able to expand the content of each session, as we shared news, celebrations and wonderfully out of sync renditions of 'Happy Birthday'.

We enjoyed a return to the centre for four weeks in October, running a trial of in person, socially distanced dance and art activities. This was a wonderful chance to reconnect in person with small groups of service users. This short trial has also given us a blueprint for how we can return to face to face activities once again in the future.

Autumn term achievements



We finished the year in a spirit of celebration even though we were once again confined to meeting remotely and our online activities took on a festive feel. We were also focused on the future and how best to continue meeting the needs of all of our service users through the uncertain weeks and months ahead.

Gratitude and reflections

Huge thanks must go to our fantastic tutors Hannelore, Flora and Ricky for their creativity, determination and positivity throughout this challenging year and to our fantastic volunteers Linda and Eddie who have provided invaluable practical support that enabled us

to return to the centre in October. Our video editing volunteers, Jonny and Nigel, showed incredible generosity by sharing their time and skills with us, allowing us to find a way forward at the most difficult time, and our Board of Trustees have provided support, encouragement and vision – ensuring that Stepping Stones has continued to provide meaningful and worthwhile activities for adults with learning disabilities.

Stepping Stones has much to be grateful for at the end of 2020. We have survived, and in unexpected ways we have thrived. Tutors and service users have embraced the challenges of digital provision and all of our horizons have been broadened.

We have
shared

We have
cared

We have
connected

Unlike so many experiences this year, our achievements have not been made in isolation. Donations and grants we received in 2019 was crucial in meeting the challenges we faced at the start of the year and we feel so fortunate to have received further funding during 2020 that has allowed us to continue developing and delivering our activities and services.

Everyone at Stepping Stones extend our heartfelt thanks to:

Peter Minet Trust

London Community Response Fund

Terra Firma Charitable Trust

Baily Thomas Trust

Southwark Adult Learning Service

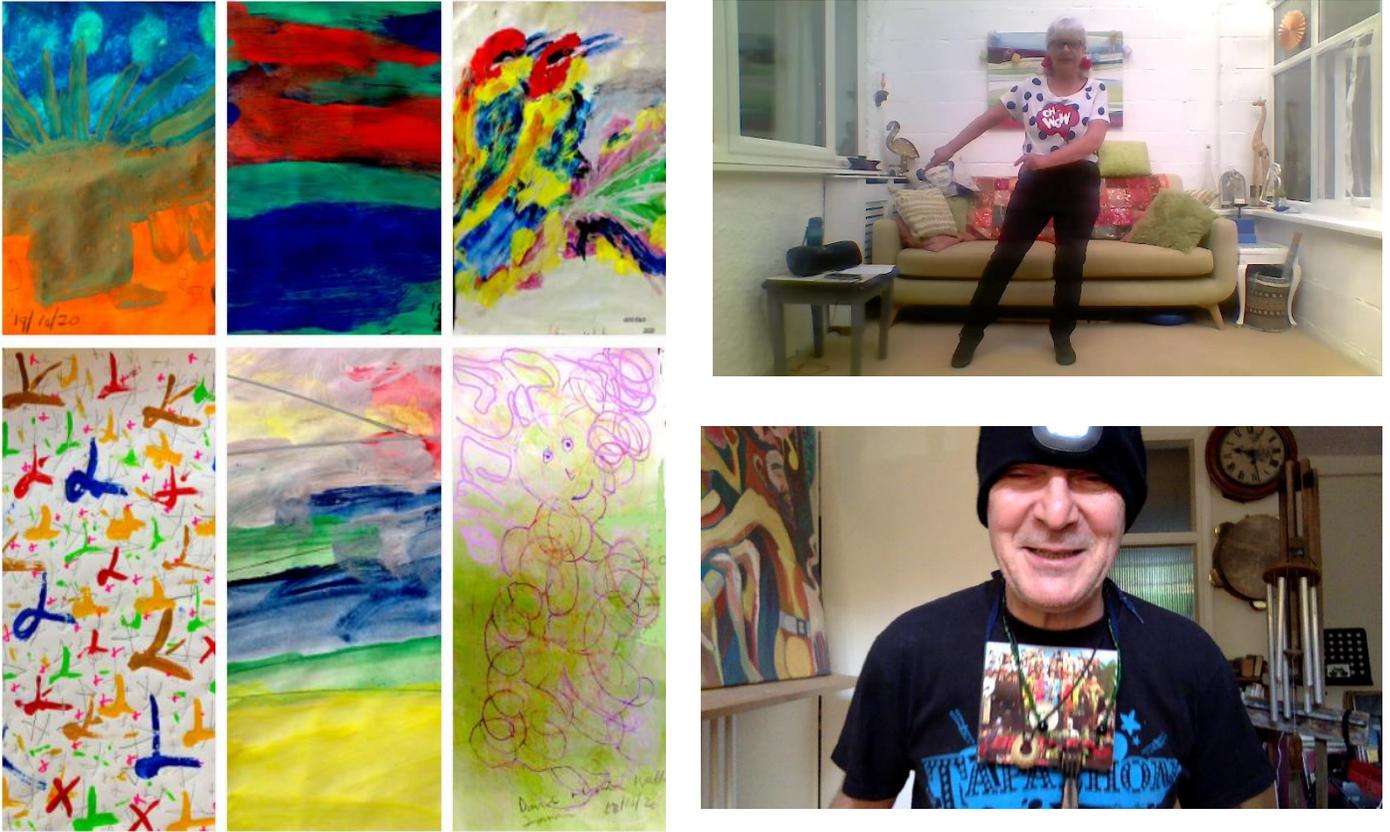
Southwark Neighbourhood Fund

St Faiths Parish

A finally, a huge thank you to our service users. Thank you for your courage, your creativity, and your company. You make each session and all of our work worthwhile.

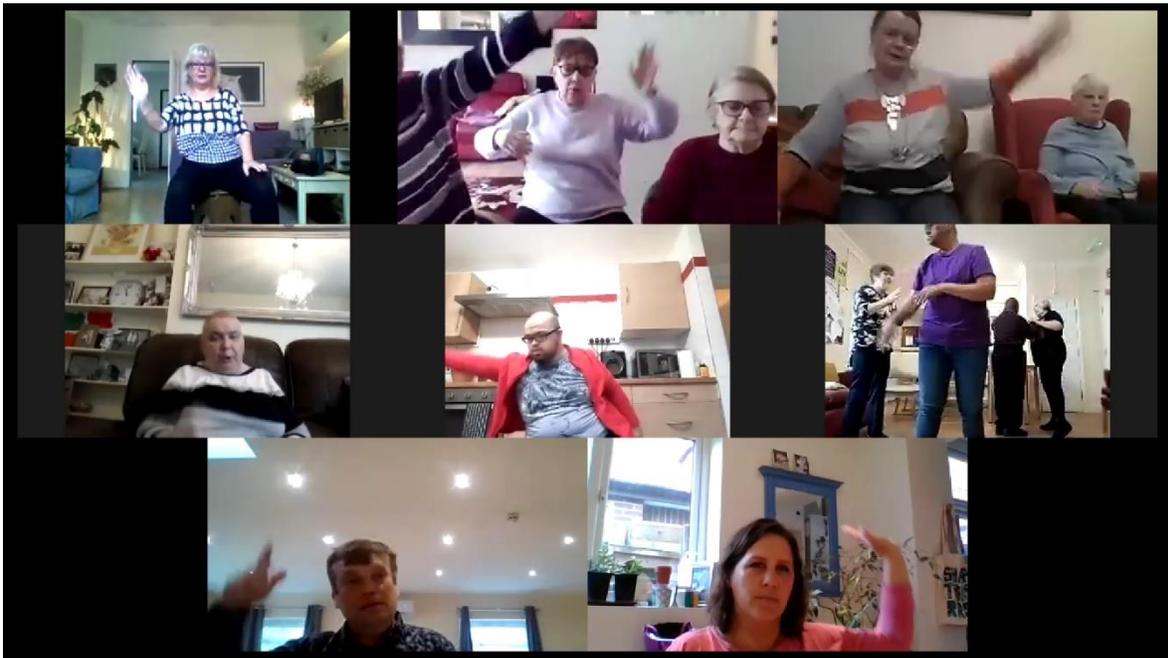
Catriona Finlayson
Operations Manager

2020 in pictures



Lockdown art

Dance and music videos



Zoom classes

Treasurer's report

2020 was a unique year. Having to suspend our classes on March, we diverted our resources into reaching out to our service users who were more socially isolated than ever, and then into using technology to provide classes remotely. It is thanks to our funders that we were in a sound financial state that enabled us to make this transition.

Our income for 2020 was £47,185, compared to £86,668 in 2019 and £57,342 in 2018. We did not charge our service users any fees after the shutdown in March, which lost us about £9,000 in revenue.

Our spending was £49,615, compared to £58,629 in 2019 and £54,346 in 2018. Running costs, e.g. hall hire, were down, although much of the spending budgeted for classes was re-invested into outreach and online classes.

Our overall loss for the year was £2,430. Our total assets carried forward into 2021 were £79,568.

Our accounts are independently examined annually by our accountants, Gibson's Financial Limited, and their separate report containing more detailed financial information is available and filed on the charity commission website.

Terry Baldwin
Treasurer in 2020

Stepping Stones Learning and Leisure

Registered charity: 1174850

Registered address:

Stepping Stones

St Faiths Centre

Red Post Hill

London

SE24 9JQ

www.steppingstoneslearning.org.uk

07950 612 914

info@steppingstoneslearning.org.uk