THE RACHEL SWART FUND

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



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CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Charting the Future ~ With Renewed Focus and Fresh Leadership

After more than 60 years of impactful work, the Rachel Swart Fund stands at a pivotal moment in its journey.

Over the past decade, we've deepened our commitment not only to mobility but also to community-based support and inclusion. We've piloted and explored powerful models of community development, working closely with families, caregivers, and local partners to understand the true levers of change for people with disabilities — especially in rural areas.

Now, with experience to guide us and a clear mandate to scale what works, we are refining our strategy for the future.

As part of this evolution, I am proud to announce two key developments:

- The appointment of a new Director, whose leadership brings expertise, fresh energy, and a passion for community-rooted disability inclusion.

- The formation of a dedicated Fundraising Team, who will work to grow and diversify the resources we need to sustain and expand our work.



Together, this new leadership team is well-positioned to drive the next chapter of the Rachel Swart Fund — one that balances legacy with innovation, and continues to put the needs and voices of people with disabilities at the centre of everything we do.

We remain grounded in our founding principles of dignity, inclusion, and access, and are excited to take these values forward through a refreshed strategic plan, strong governance, and deep partnerships — with you, our community of supporters.

Thank you for continuing to walk this path with us.

Phillip Mcelu
Chairman
Rachel Swart Fund



VISION

All people with disabilities live with dignity, independence, and full inclusion.

MISSION

To empower people with disabilities by improving access to mobility, community-led rehabilitation, skills development, and inclusion, with a focus on the most marginalised individuals in rural and peri-urban areas.



VALUES

Community
Solutions built with, not for, communities

Innovation
Resourceful creativity that drives impact

Collaboration
Collective effort creates lasting change

Dignity
Everyone has value and deserves care

Inclusion
We all benefit when everyone belongs

Sustainability
Lasting solutions, lasting impact

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



RUTH SWART

Building on Legacy, Driving Mobility Forward

Taking the reins of the Rachel Swart Fund in August 2024 has been both an honour and an inspiration. Throughout the past year I have visited all our partner projects, spending time with caregivers, therapists, families, and people with disabilities.

Connecting with our beneficiaries offered invaluable insight into the structural and social challenges shaping daily life in the communities we serve. Volunteering at the annual Gijima inclusive sports event deepened this understanding even further. There, I met motivated athletes, proud parents, committed families and dedicated clinicians — all pushing, in their own ways, to build a more inclusive society for people with disabilities.

Throughout these visits, I was reminded of the Fund's founding mission: mobility as a pathway to dignity and independence. I am often asked whether my sharing a name with Rachel Swart, in whose honour the Fund was established more than sixty years ago, means I have a personal link to her. I do not, but her story, and the qualities she embodied, continue to resonate deeply. It was her determination, resilience and ability to live fully despite significant physical disability that inspired the founding of the Fund. I carry the responsibility of this role with great respect for her legacy and for the decades of work that have followed.





For over six decades, the Fund has provided essential mobility devices to people who would otherwise be excluded from education, employment, and full participation in their communities. Yet the need remains immense. Across South Africa, many still live without access to the equipment that makes movement and opportunity possible. With ongoing resource constraints in the public health system, our role in providing and maintaining mobility devices is more vital than ever.

Expanding our core assistive device programme to meet the growing need remains a central priority. We are also strengthening support for grassroots, disability-led community organisations and investing in skills development to expand disability-focused services in rural areas.

Together, these efforts form the basis of our long-term strategy, supported by renewed fundraising and stronger collaboration across the disability and rehabilitation sector. These partnerships help us extend our collective impact and ensure no one is left behind.

As we look ahead, our commitment remains clear: to honour our legacy, deepen our reach, and continue enabling people with disabilities to live with dignity, independence and inclusion.

Ruth Swart
Director
Rachel Swart Fund



ASSISTIVE DEVICE PROJECT

For more than 60 years, the Rachel Swart Fund has stepped in when families have nowhere else to turn. Every year, we meet people whose independence requires equipment that the public health system cannot provide. Our role is not to replace the state but to stand alongside it, and every application must first be logged through public-sector channels so unmet need is formally recorded for future planning.

As a last-resort funder, we only accept applications once all public pathways have been fully explored. This ensures our limited resources reach those with the greatest need, rather than operating as a fast-track alternative to state services. Requiring applicants to first engage the public system keeps gaps visible for government planning and directs our support to people with no other options. When RSF finally says “yes,” it comes at a moment of real vulnerability, making the impact immediate and transformative.

Each application is carefully assessed by our Medical Committee, clinicians with vast public-sector experience, to ensure the prescribed device is appropriate for the client, their home environment and daily life. This may mean a motorised wheelchair, a manual chair, a hoist, a commode or pressure-care equipment; various devices that restore independence and dignity.

Our support does not end with delivery. When batteries fail or parts break, people can quickly lose the mobility they fought hard to regain. Batteries and parts are costly, so RSF covers repairs and replacements to ensure devices stay safe and dependable.

At its heart, this programme restores more than mobility. It restores dignity, confidence and the ability to participate fully in family and community life.





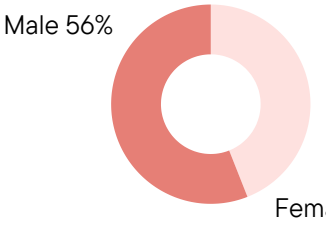
ASSISTIVE DEVICE PROJECT

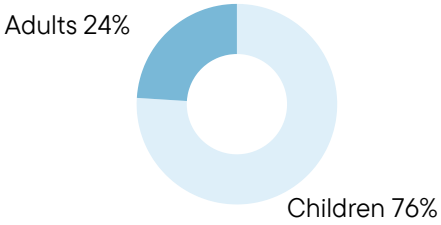
IMPACT

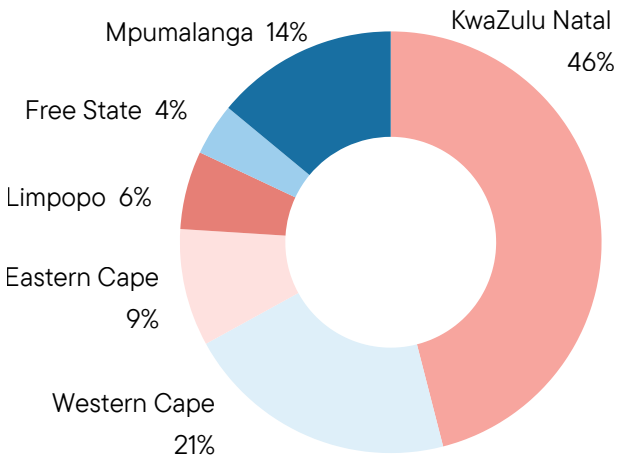
84

Individuals served by our assistive device project

DEVICE BENEFICIARIES







Device Spend by Province

NATIONAL REACH

During the 2024/25 financial year, we approved applications from six provinces, reflecting the growing national reach of our work. Still, more can be done to ensure that therapists and social workers across the country know about our role as a last-chance resource for clients who have exhausted all other funding avenues.







MEET OUR RECIPIENTS



Mthobisi

KwaZulu Natal

Mthobisi from Umlazi enjoys his work at his local APD and values the inclusive community there. His new motorised wheelchair means he can travel to work independently, stay connected and continue doing what he enjoys with ease and confidence.



Asanda

Eastern Cape

Asanda is a lively, sociable teenager with a great sense of humour and a love for life. Her new motorised wheelchair means she will be able to sit comfortably and move with greater independence and ease.



Donald

Limpopo

In rural Limpopo, Donald is back on air hosting his radio show for people with disabilities. His new motorised wheelchair has restored Donald's independence, enabling him to share his voice and connect with his community once again.



Rosemary

KwaZulu Natal

Rosemary's new motorised wheelchair gives her independence and control over her daily life. She can continue her wheelchair repair work, support her family, and stay connected to her community without relying on others for mobility.



Liyabona

KwaZulu Natal

Fifteen-year-old Liya in Durban is ready to take on the world. His new motorised wheelchair gives him the freedom and confidence every teenager deserves to make the most of school and friendships.



Marcelle

Western Cape

Marcelle says her new wheelchair feels like the start of something new. After years of struggle, she now moves with ease and renewed confidence. This change has brought joy not only to her but to everyone around her.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

We believe that improving mobility for people with disabilities is about far more than distributing wheelchairs and assistive devices. True, lasting change comes from building skills, systems, and services that ensure that appropriate and safe devices are issued and result in sustained mobility long after the equipment is delivered.

In South Africa's rural and under-resourced areas, the public health system faces ongoing challenges; from limited therapy budgets and staff shortages to a lack of local technical expertise. Without these supports, people are often stranded at home or confined to bed as their wheelchairs remain broken; children with cerebral palsy lose strength and function without access to proper positioning devices; and therapists, lacking the specialised skills to address complex seating needs or provide home-based follow-up, are unable to meet the growing demand for care.

To address these gaps, we have developed a skills development programme focused on strengthening disability and rehabilitation services where resources are limited.



This initiative builds practical expertise in key areas:

- **Professional seating training for therapists**
- **Wheelchair repair and maintenance**
- **Appropriate Paper Technology (APT) for low-cost assistive devices**
- **Peer support training for community workers.**

Our three-year partnership with the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health is one example of how this approach is helping to expand capacity, empower service providers, and ensure sustainable access to mobility across communities.

THERAPIST TRAINING

Enabling Therapists to Prescribe Safely and Confidently

In partnership with the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health and Rehab Skills Lab, we delivered specialised seating training for state-employed therapists. The training is tailored for the South African context and aligned with World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for under-resourced settings.



Correct wheelchair seating is about more than comfort: it prevents pressure sores, deformities and long-term injury while improving independence, function and participation. Yet few therapists receive this type of specialised training.

During the 2024/2025 financial year we delivered the Intermediate Seating Course, equipping 14 therapists in rural hospitals, and a further 20 via the Basic Seating Course. The Basic course covers core assessment, matching wheelchair features with users' basic postural support needs, while the Intermediate course builds on this with more advanced clinical reasoning, postural assessment and fitting of postural support devices for users with more complex needs.



WHEELCHAIR REPAIR TRAINING

Skills That Empower

In rural areas, wheelchair users often wait weeks for repairs, limiting their independence and daily functioning.

Maintenance is essential, but technical repair skills are scarce. To address this, the Rachel Swart Fund has been building repair and maintenance capacity within the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health's wheelchair repair units.

Importantly, these repairers are people living with disabilities, now earning a livelihood while restoring mobility for others.

This year 42 individuals were trained to strip down, rebuild, and repair both manual and motorised wheelchairs, ensuring that vital equipment remains in use and functional.





A new standing frame enables this young child to look up, join in, and feel part of things.

APPROPRIATE PAPER TECHNOLOGY

When funding for specialised postural devices is limited, innovation becomes essential. Appropriate Paper Technology (APT) offers a low-cost, eco-friendly solution for creating custom assistive devices using recycled cardboard, flour paste and other locally available materials. This technique produces strong, lightweight items such as standing frames and desks for children with cerebral palsy, devices that are often otherwise unavailable.

Since 2021, RSF has trained communities to build these devices themselves, expanding access to appropriate postural support in settings where resources are scarce.

Correct postural support plays a vital role in preventing contractures, supporting healthy muscle and bone development, and enabling children to participate more fully in learning and play.

This year, we trained 38 community workers living with disabilities, strengthening local skills and ensuring that communities have the practical skills to produce appropriate assistive equipment for children who need it.

PEER SUPPORT TRAINING

Strengthening Connection Through Lived Experience

In rural areas, people with disabilities and their caregivers have limited access to formal rehabilitation services. They often face isolation, health complications, and challenges integrating into daily life.

We recognise that there is power in lived experience. Those who have faced similar challenges bring unique understanding, inspiration, and practical insight that professionals alone cannot offer. By training and connecting peer supporters, we are building a network of empathy, shared knowledge, and mutual strength that reinforces both individuals and communities.

This year we trained a team of mothers of children with cerebral palsy through our parent facilitator training, delivered in partnership with Malamulele Onward.

The programme equips parents to support and educate other families in their communities on practical caregiving, including safe positioning, movement support, feeding, communication, and emotional wellbeing. This peer-led approach fosters confidence, inclusion, and better long-term outcomes for children with disabilities.



SYNERGY WITH STATE

Sustainable Rehabilitation Services in KwaZulu-Natal







In the second year of our three-year capacity-building partnership with the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health, the Rachel Swart Fund continues to play a key role in strengthening the province's rehabilitation services.

Together, we are working to ensure that government can deliver on its policy commitments to provide effective, community-centred care for people with disabilities across all districts.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN NUMBERS

34
Therapists Trained in Seating

42
Wheelchair Repairers Trained

38
Community Workers Trained in APT

1
Community-led Peer Support Team Trained



COMMUNITY-LED PROJECTS

Real change happens in communities when stakeholders come together, combine their strengths, and make full use of the resources available.

Since 2020, the Rachel Swart Fund has supported community-led projects that provide home-based assistance for people with disabilities in underserved rural areas. Many communities are far from hospitals and therapy centres, leaving people isolated without the rehabilitation services they need.

Our strategy is built on partnership. We work alongside grassroots, disability-led organisations to strengthen their capacity and sustainability through mentoring, technical support, and resource mobilisation.

This aligns with global best practice: when communities design and deliver their own disability services, the impact is more relevant and lasting.

A key partner is Siletha iThemba in Manguzi, northern KwaZulu-Natal. With our support, they provide peer-led rehabilitation, wheelchair repairs, and advocacy.

Peer support is central to this work, delivered through two specialised teams: the Spinal Cord Injury Peer Support Team and the Parent Facilitator Team for children with cerebral palsy and their caregivers.

PARENT FACILITATORS

Currently, the parent facilitators work with over 100 families through home visits and four support groups at clinics in the Manguzi area.

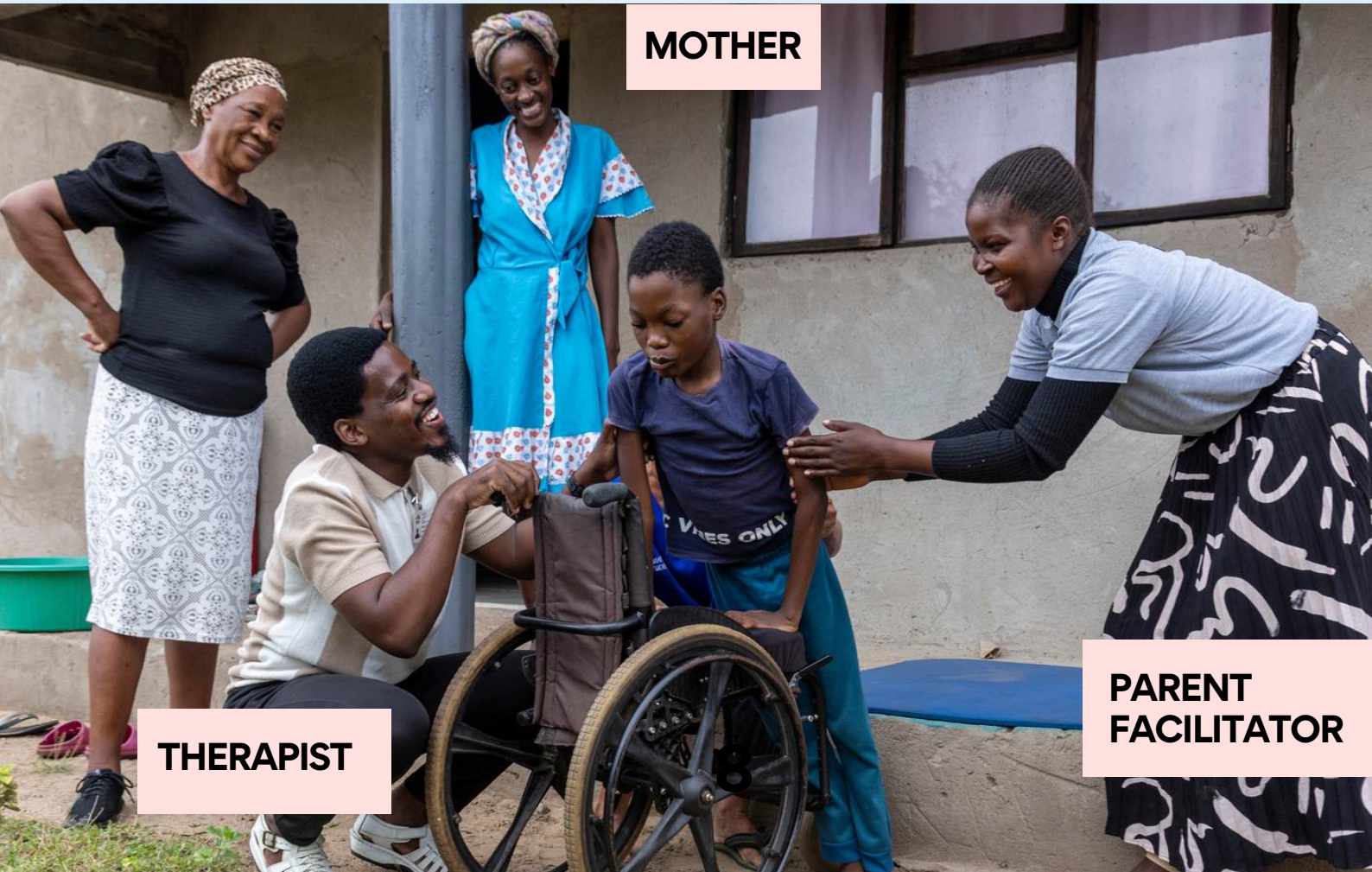
Below, Phumzile - a parent facilitator, is working with a hospital therapist to teach a boy with cerebral palsy how to get into and out of his wheelchair unassisted. Phumzile will work regularly with the boy's mother to achieve this rehab goal.

Her own experience parenting a child with cerebral palsy and her extensive training enable her to offer practical support and a profound understanding of the challenges facing families living with disability

Home visit frequency varies from monthly to every six months, depending on the child's progress and caregiver needs.

Caregivers, often single mothers, can become caught in cycles of guilt, shame, and isolation. Parent facilitators work tirelessly to help families understand the importance of home rehabilitation programmes in maximising physical function.

When breakthroughs happen, results can be remarkable — this year, a seven-year-old with cerebral palsy learned to walk independently through regular home therapy.







SPINAL CORD INJURY SUPPORT

A spinal cord injury is life-altering everywhere, but in rural, low-resource settings the impact is far harsher. After hospital discharge, many people return to homes without running water, pressure-relieving mattresses, reliable catheter supplies or nearby rehabilitation services. Without this support, preventable complications such as pressure sores, infections and malnutrition can quickly lead to decline, isolation and a slow, avoidable deterioration. Our Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Peer Support Team exists to interrupt this trajectory and offer a pathway to stability, dignity and improved health.

The team currently supports 61 clients. Of these, 39 clients are making steady progress and receive monthly home visits or phone calls.

Peer supporters help clients follow their rehabilitation programmes, supply incontinence products and catheters, and ensure wheelchairs are properly maintained; practical support that prevents complications and helps people to stay active in their communities.

There are 18 clients who need more intensive support and are visited up to twice a week. Many face challenges with personal care, limited family support or adjusting emotionally to paralysis.

Peer supporters teach essential daily-living and wheelchair skills and work closely with families to strengthen the care available at home.

DISABILITY ADVOCACY



In addition to their direct service work, the peer support team actively engage in advocacy and inclusion initiatives that give visibility and voice to people with disabilities.

Each year, they play a key role in organising the Gijima Inclusive Sports and Wellness Festival — a two-day community event that brings together people with disabilities, their families, government partners, and the wider community. The first day focuses on dialogue and accountability through a community engagement workshop, where over 300 participants meet with government representatives to discuss the barriers that prevent full participation in society.

The second day celebrates inclusion through sport, health screening, and advocacy, with more than 2,000 participants — including around 800 people with disabilities. The festival shows that inclusion is not only about policy, but about presence, visibility, and participation — coming together as equals to celebrate ability, resilience, and community.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

313

direct beneficiaries reached through our community-led initiatives

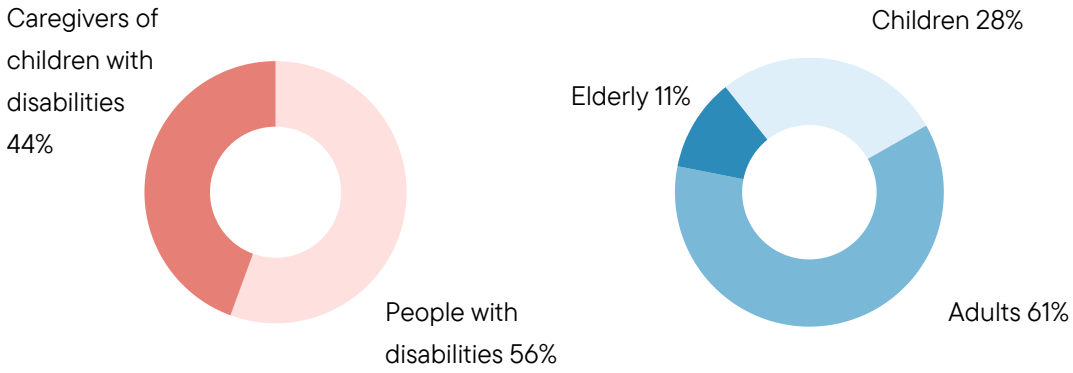
101

families raising children with cerebral palsy supported

6222

hours of person-to-person support in our communities this year

PROJECT BENEFICIARIES





FINANCIAL REVIEW

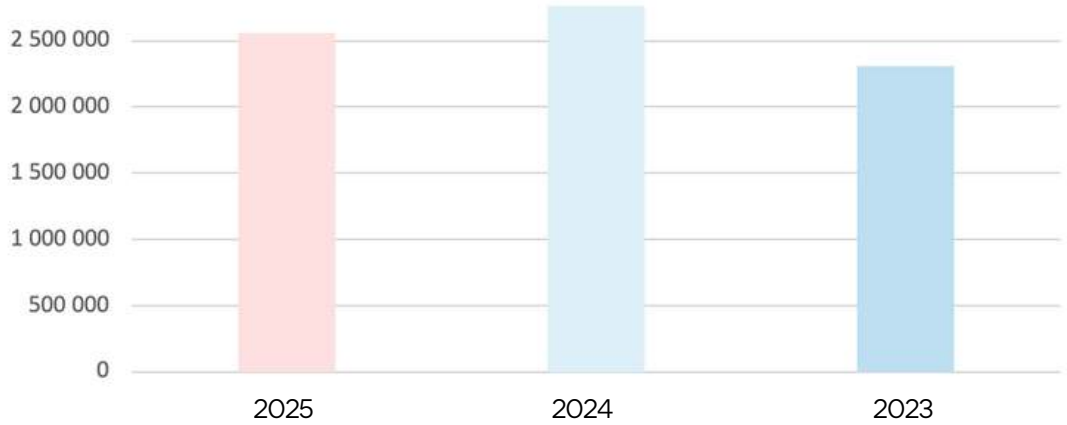
Over the past three years, our income has reflected a steady performance in the face of significant organisational transition. Total income decreased from R2.76 million in 2024 to R2.56 million in 2025, reflecting the overlap between the end of a major funding cycle and a leadership gap between April and August 2024, during which fundraising momentum slowed.

Our newly formed fundraising team began in July 2024 and focused first on developing a long-term strategy and strengthening relationships with existing partners , essential groundwork that naturally takes time to convert into new funding commitments.

A key strength this year was the strong performance of our reserve fund, which generated increased returns through dividends, interest, and asset appreciation. Importantly, the reserve fund acts as a stabilising buffer that helps RSF remain sustainable in years when grant and donor income does not fully cover the true cost of delivering our work. This enables us to cover essential administrative and governance costs responsibly, while continuing to channel donor funding directly into high impact community projects. In doing so, the reserve fund supports continuity, reduces financial risk, and allows for long term commitment.

Looking ahead, our goal is to secure donor partnerships that support both programme and administrative costs, enabling a fully sustainable and resilient organisation.

Total Income



	2025	2024	2023
Total income	**R2 560 732,00**	**R2 760 872,41**	**R2 312 014,53**
Donor Funding	R2 126 853,00	R2 548 267,34	R2 045 997,78
Other Income	R433 879,00	R212 605,07	R266 016,75

DIRECT PROJECT SPEND

Our direct expenditure on projects this year reflects a balanced investment in direct services, community leadership, and long-term sustainability.

We invested R491 729 in assistive device provision, ensuring mobility and independence. A further R58 000 was spent on repairs to ensure the safety and long-term function of the devices we issue.

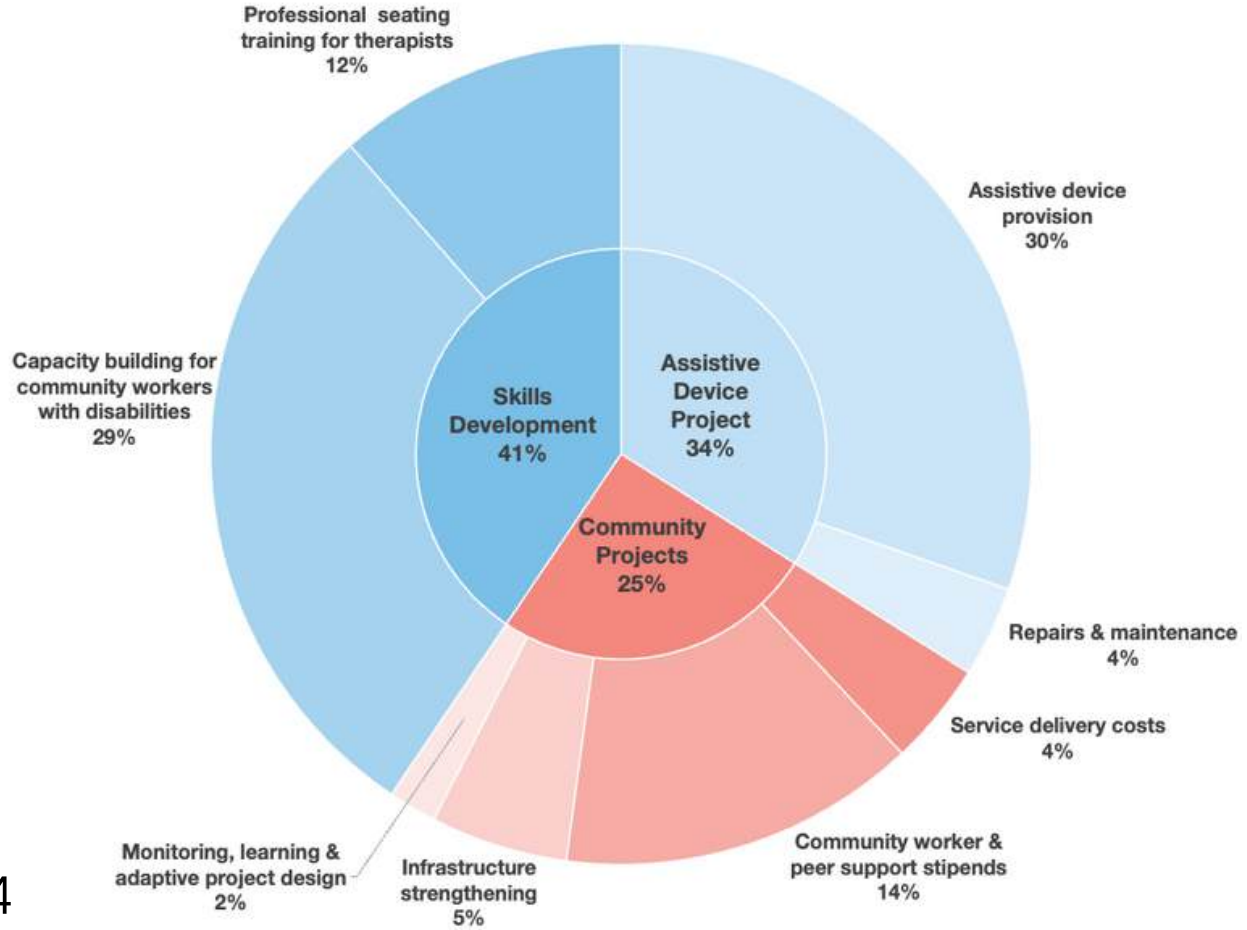
Direct service delivery in the community including transport, airtime, and essential logistics accounted for R66 000, ensuring our teams could reach households in remote rural areas.

We invested R229 000 in community worker & peer support stipends, recognising the essential role played by people with disabilities who deliver services grounded in lived experience.

Through community infrastructure strengthening (R87 508) and substantial capacity building (R656 954) for community workers with disabilities and therapists, we invested in improving local environments and building long-term local skills.

Our commitment to continuous learning and accountability is reflected in the R31 000 allocated to monitoring, learning & adaptive project design, ensuring that our projects remain relevant, responsive, and community-led.

Direct Project Spend



THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Our work this year was made possible through the generosity, commitment and trust of the individuals, organisations and partners who stand with us. Your support is far more than financial — it is an investment in dignity, independence and inclusion for people with disabilities across South Africa.

FOUNDATIONS AND ORGANISATIONS

KwaZulu Natal Department of Health

The Victor Daitz Foundation

ELMA Masana Wa Afrika

The Rolf-Stephan Nussbaum Foundation

Joan St Leger Lindbergh Charitable Trust

A to Z Impact Foundation

The David Graaf Foundation

Douglas Jooste Trust

P.A. Don Charitable Trust

F.G. Connock Charity Trust

Clifford Harris Trust

The Beare Foundation



INDIVIDUALS

Elmarie Du Preez
Esme Parsons
Martin Sodoms
Samson K Joseph
Lena Syster
Carlito Michaels
Jacoba Sars
Duane James
Desmond De Koker
Stephanus Smit
Vivendhran Govinsamy
Yolanda Webb
Phillip Cordier
Asanda Rala Rala
Elvin Rixi
Ilyaaz Noordien



At the Rachel Swart Fund, we believe that meaningful change is built through partnership. Every wheelchair issued or repaired, every home visited, every family supported and every community strengthened reflects a shared effort between our team and the people who choose to back our mission. Your contributions enable us to reach those who cannot access the services or equipment they urgently need, and they ensure that no one is left behind because of geography, circumstance or poverty.

Your generosity allows us to deliver practical, community-based programmes that change lives. Together, we are expanding access to mobility and strengthening disability-led support in rural communities.

Thank you for standing with us. Your partnership makes our work possible, and we are deeply grateful for the impact we create together.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following people and organisations who have worked tirelessly on or provided much needed support for the projects mentioned within.

Board Members

P. Mcelu - Chairman
S. Zokwe - Vice-Chair
G. Richter
V. Ramanjam
S. Rahim
I. Hendricks
T. Appalraju

Personnel

Nathaline Petersen - Project Coordinator
Ilse Tennant & Nicolas Townes - Fundraisers
Ulrich Truter - Financial Accountant
Ruth Swart - Director

Partners

KZN Department of Health Disability and Rehabilitation
Siletha iThemba
Recycling and Mobility Rehab
CJ Wheelchairs
Rehab Skills Lab

Contact

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