

Commonwealth
activities by
social workers

Activity Report
2022-2023

FOREWORD BY THE PRESIDENT



I am pleased to present the Annual Activity Report of COSW for the period 2022-2023.

The past year has been yet another incredible journey for COSW. We retained our Commonwealth [accreditation](#) and have remained active in Commonwealth dialogues, including regular contact with the [Commonwealth Secretariat](#). This has included participation in the Heads of Government Meeting in Rwanda and other Ministerial dialogues.

We have worked with partners to push forward [The People's Charter for an Eco-Social World](#) alongside consistent coordination between COSW and the global social work bodies, international NGOs and the other Commonwealth Organisations. We have sustained our

close working relationship with [IFSW](#) and are grateful for consistent support from the IFSW Secretariat.

We made a major decision to make a major change in our constitution and governance arrangements in September 2023. This historic decision lays the foundation for the continued development of COSW and its growing influence. The new structures are designed to ensure that COSW is directly connected to every Commonwealth country and able to build on an understanding of the wide diversity of Commonwealth communities. We will be working with individuals and organisations to ensure that all 56 Commonwealth countries have a representative on the new COSW Commonwealth Council.

Our [webinars](#) have been well attended and our website attracts an increasing number of visitors.

It is becoming more and more evident that COSW, with its strong networks, is promoting the Commonwealth goals of prosperity, democracy and peace, ensuring that the voice and contribution of social workers is recognised and respected.

We are sincerely grateful to those who have made grants and donations, especially BASW for the substantial grant towards the costs of attending CHOGM in June 2022. Our resources are extremely modest but we certainly demonstrate the social workers' capacity for creativity and resourcefulness, as you will discover as you read our report.

Finally, I am grateful to all the Board members for their activity, engagement and support and for all their hard work on a voluntary basis. We look forward to involving more colleagues from Commonwealth countries as we implement our new governance arrangements which come into force in October 2024.

Front cover photo - Syed Adnan Ahmed Shah and Omar Mohamed at Youth Ministers' Meeting

COMMONWEALTH YOUNG CARERS CHARTER PARTNERSHIP



Young carers from across the Commonwealth have developed this Charter, grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Young carers in every country look after someone in their family who has an illness or a disability or other condition. Sometimes they look after the whole family. Young carers are children and young people first and should be free to develop emotionally and physically and to take full advantage of opportunities for educational achievement and life success.

"It is important to involve young carers in all aspects of policy making and decision making. We have a voice - listen to us!"

AS YOUNG CARERS FROM AROUND THE COMMONWEALTH WE ASK THAT WE:

- Are listened to and our views and culture are respected.
 - Do not face discrimination as a carer or for our family situation.
 - Have our physical health and emotional needs acknowledged and assessed.
 - Have a right to an assessment of our needs separate from the needs of the person we care for.
 - Have the right support given to the person we care for, so we don't have to provide excessive care which impacts on our own health and wellbeing.
 - Have practical support and help offered including respite care.
 - Are protected from psychological and physical harm.
 - Have the right to education, time to focus on our studies and be offered real choices in accessing further education and future aspirations.
 - Have the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.
 - Have a home that is suitable and safe for us and our family.
- Young carers should be treated equally - no one should be judged because of their family situation.
- It's hard ... rights to find a balance in life - trying everything we have to do.
- Being a young carer can be challenging and sometimes we all need a little support and love and just to be seen and valued.
- Adults who work with us should know about who we care for and how it might affect us.
- We need schools to respect and understand the impact we have to deal with at home!

The Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work (COSW) works with others to ensure that social work values and social concerns are heard in the Commonwealth. Find out more at www.cosw.co.uk

This project has run for over 16 years focused on East Africa and the UK but in 2019, with the aid of a Commonwealth Secretariat grant, the reach of the project extended to young carers in other Commonwealth countries and this was further extended in 2022-3.

Following consultations with young people in several Commonwealth countries, a draft Young Carers Charter was launched in a participant event in the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) People's Forum in Kigali. The seminar was presented jointly with International Social Service, It's a Penalty, Commonwealth Lawyers Association, Hope and Homes for Children, and others. This was followed up by further consultations which confirmed the key elements adopted.

The Charter was showcased in the COSW Policy Forum in October 2022 and a pan-Commonwealth webinar was organised jointly with the Commonwealth Secretariat and Carers Trust (UK) in June 2023. Contributions came from projects and young carers in 12 countries, with a supportive presentation from the Commonwealth Youth Programme and an inspiring message from the founder of the JLS Band, Oritsé Williams, who was himself a former young carer. The Charter continues to attract support from a wider range of organisations as it becomes more known.



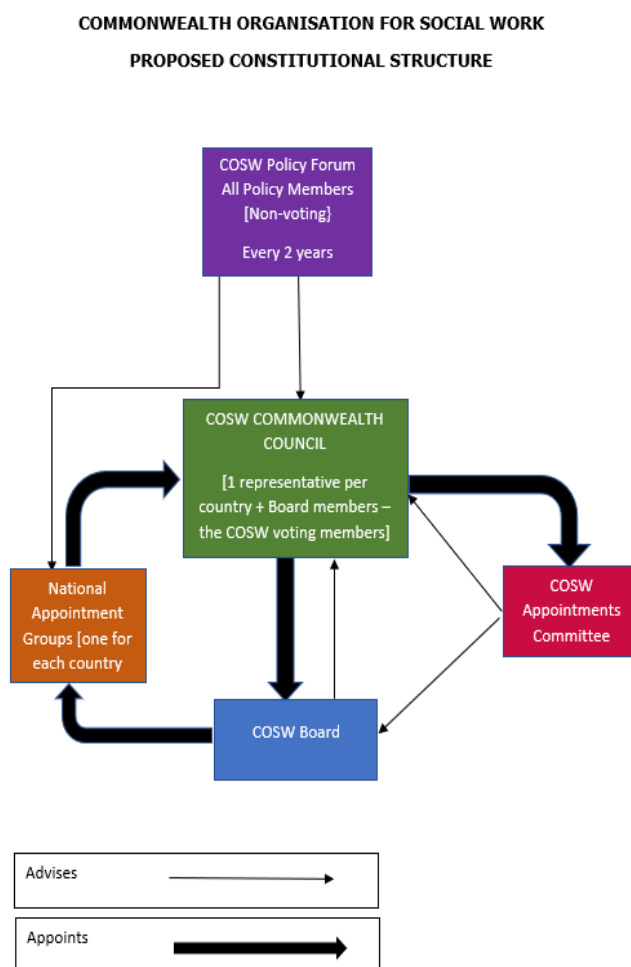
Oritsé and David Jones at St James Palace, London

The Charter was recognised in the communiqués from the Commonwealth Health and Youth Ministers Meetings in 2023. The CYMM ministerial communiqué stated: "We welcome the strategies proposed in our roundtable discussions to enhance inclusion and safeguarding of our young people by exploring the use of various policy approaches and tools, such as the young carer's charter ..." (Para 25). COSW representative David Jones was able to address the meeting (see picture below) and thanked ministers for their support. COSW and partners are working to achieve endorsement by CHOGM 2024.



REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION

The COSW constitutional structure has effectively remained unchanged since its formal adoption in 2000 and registration as a company limited by guarantee in 2005. The Board agreed that there is a need to review the structure to ensure sustainability and improve transparency. The Board engaged in dialogue over several months, including reviewing the structure of other Commonwealth Organisations and of similar voluntary and membership-based organisations. The Board eventually concluded that COSW should have a constitution based on a 'trust' model rather than the more traditional association membership model, noting the administrative challenges in managing a global membership with limited resources.



David N Jones
27 August 2022

The COSW Board approved the outline of the new structure at its meeting in September 2022 with a two-year implementation programme to put all the elements in place. The proposals include creation of a COSW Commonwealth Council with a representative from each Commonwealth country having equal votes.

The new and unique governance structures and related issues were presented in an open online event in October 2022 and members approved a new constitution formally enshrining these elements in September 2023 which has been formally lodged at Companies House. The new structure will be implemented over the next 12 months and will substantially increase engagement with COSW, offering many more opportunities for individuals and organisations, including national social work associations and universities, to become involved.

COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING

COSW was represented by East African colleagues at [CHOGM 2022](#) in Kigali. COSW took a lead role in organising a participant event in the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) People's Forum in Kigali. The seminar was presented jointly with International Social Service, It's a Penalty, Commonwealth Lawyers Association, Hope and Homes for Children, and others. The CHOGM outcomes shaped our work and advocacy in the following year.



From Left: Gerald Okiria (UG), Charles Mbugua (KE) and Innocent Hambifura (RW) at the CHOGM official Opening Ceremony.



From Left: Gerald Okiria (UG), Alice Mbiyu (KE) and Innocent Hambifura (RW) some of the COSW delegates at the Commonwealth Peoples' Forums

COMMONWEALTH NETWORKING

COSW has an active engagement with several formal and informal Commonwealth networks.

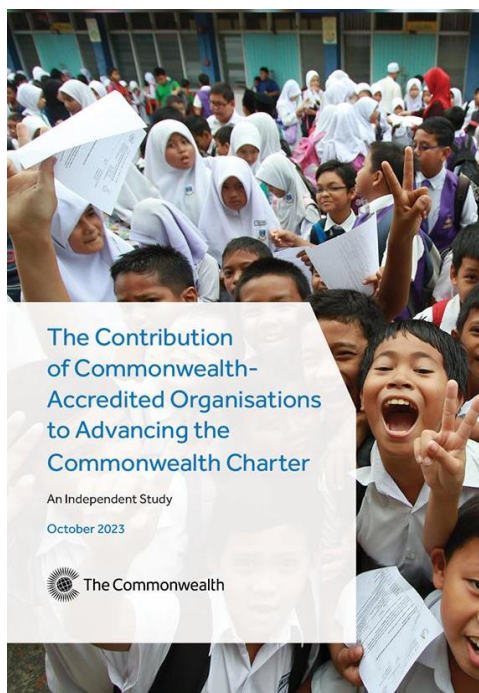


COSW representative promoting social work at a break in the Youth Ministers Meeting

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COSW plays a key role in the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations and a COSW Board member sits on the IFCO Steering Group. COSW took a lead role in drafting and presenting the submission of accredited organisations to CHOGM 2022 and in the IFCO engagement with Commonwealth institutions.



COSW contributed to the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned project on the contribution of accredited organisations to the Commonwealth. Comments from a COSW Board Member are cited in the report and the COSW Main Representative was on the Panel which launched the report.

COSW took a lead with others in forming the Commonwealth Children's Interest Group (ComCIG) in 2022, working closely with another accredited organisation. International Social Service (CFAB) is providing the administrative support for the group. The group has given priority to implementation of the Kigali Declaration on child care reform and supported a Secretariat online roundtable and webinar on implementation of the Declaration in 2023. ComCIG made a submission to the Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting and contributed to the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health (CACH).

A COSW Board member, K. S. Ramesh, was elected as Secretary of the Commonwealth Health Professions and Partners Alliance. COSW continues to make an active contribution to the Alliance, including facilitating two major presentations in the online civil society forum in April 2023. A COSW Board member is a civil society representative on CACH.



COSW supports the Call to Action issued by the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN) and continues to engage with the network and other Commonwealth partners to ensure 'sustainable urbanisation' in Commonwealth countries. A COSW Board member based in Nairobi continues to liaise with UN Habitat based there.

COSW welcomes constructive dialogue with the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Foundation and welcomes continued partnerships in areas of common interest.

COSW HELPS SHAPE HEALTH MINISTERS' COMMUNIQUÉ



Members of CACH at Marlborough House – April 2023

The Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health (CACH) includes representatives of around ten member states, alongside several civil society representatives from regional bodies and Commonwealth Organisations (COs). It is COSW's turn to provide one of the two CO representatives, undertaken by David Jones (COSW Main Representative to the Commonwealth institutions) for 2022-4.

The 2022 meeting was virtual with an in-person meeting at Marlborough House in April 2023. The agenda included a review of the CACH structure and efficiency alongside a focus on specific health conditions. Probably

the main item was to prepare a draft statement for the meeting of Health Ministers in May.

The [statement](#) included several references to social services, in part thanks to COSW advocacy, and was adopted by Ministers with minimal changes. They affirmed their 'commitment to achieving Universal Health Coverage by 2030 in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) (para 3). Ministers 'welcomed the 2022 CHOGM declaration dedicating 2023 as the Year of Youth' and 'committed to ensure young people's views are integrated in the policy planning process' (para 6).

Ministers made several statements about the health and social service workforce, acknowledging 'the fundamental role of the health and social care workforce in delivering and supporting increased access to basic and essential Primary Health Care (PHC) services. As part of this, we recognised the need to ensure greater linkages between, (and) where appropriate the integration of, health and social care services, noting that they are differently structured around the Commonwealth' (para 13).

Ministers 'recognised the pressures on the health and social care workforce since the COVID-19 pandemic' and 'underlined the need to protect and invest in all occupations engaged in health and wellbeing to deliver robust PHC services' (para 11). They 'recognised the shared challenges of human resourcing of health and social care workers' and 'agreed that best efforts be made to ensure that issues such as international migration and the mobility of health workers do not undermine countries' abilities to deliver robust health services'. COSW is considering whether to push for a Commonwealth protocol on migration of social workers.

Finally, ministers 'noted the recommendations from the Commonwealth Civil Society Policy Forum 2023'.... that calls on the Commonwealth governments to: ii. adopt the [Commonwealth Young Carer's Charter](#), recognising that young carers should be supported to develop emotionally and physically'. It was pleasing to see a COSW policy priority included there.

COSW involvement in several policy areas means that the social policy elements supporting those policies (e.g. health, education and youth) are made explicit and included in communiqués, making social work more visible and recognising the crucial contribution of social workers.

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING



COSW continues a constructive and creative relationship with IFSW. IFSW promotes COSW press releases and COSW engages with IFSW activity. COSW deeply appreciates the support provided by IFSW.

National social work associations vary in capacity and ability to engage with Commonwealth activity in addition to their links with IFSW which is the primary global representative body. COSW welcomes support from the British Association in respect of representation at Commonwealth events from time to time, including a generous donation to support the expenses of COSW representatives attending CHOGM 2022 in Rwanda.

BASW supported the formation of a BASW Diaspora Special Interest Group in 2021. Whilst taking a global perspective, the demographic of the UK inevitably means that social workers from Commonwealth countries or with Commonwealth heritage form the largest group. A COSW Board member was involved in forming the group and contributes to the Steering Group. The group has engaged in dialogue with the UK Department of Health and Social Care and has published guidance on recruitment and induction of overseas qualified social workers for employers alongside the government guidance. It holds regular online webinars and advice sessions. Contact diaspora@baswnetwork.co.uk.



COSW, in partnership with the Diaspora SIG, organised a [pan-Commonwealth webinar](#) on migration of social workers in March 2023 with speakers from New Zealand, India, Barbados/Canada and UK. COSW plans to open discussions with the Secretariat about the need for Commonwealth guidance on international recruitment of social workers.

GLOBAL SURVEY OF THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT FOR SOCIAL WORKERS



The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) has a research agreement with Bath Spa and Ulster Universities (UK) to undertake biennial global survey of social workers to gain a systematic understanding of the impact of the working environment on their health, wellbeing and effectiveness. It has been agreed that the research reports can include a specific report on the situation in Commonwealth countries. The report of the pilot study was launched at the IFSW world conference in July 2020 and the first full survey was undertaken in 2021-22. It was reported to the 2022 People's Global Summit and an academic article was published in October 2022 (Ravalier, J., D. Jones, R. Truell and P. McFadden (2022). "[Global social work working conditions and wellbeing](#)." International Social Work 65 (6): 1078–1094). It is planned to develop partnerships with universities in several Commonwealth countries as the project unfolds.

CONFERENCES AND WEBINARS



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Webinars were organised by COSW on [young carers](#), [migration of social workers](#), COSW [constitutional reform and policy](#). COSW contributed two webinars to the People's Global Summit, convened by IFSW and UNRISD, highlighting the key role of social workers in co-building a new eco-social world. The COSW plenary session focused on the importance of [partnerships between different professionals and communities](#) in the Commonwealth, with contributions from CommonAge, Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Federation and the Sustainable Urbanisation Network. A separate live panel of

COSW Board members explored [lessons learned from the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic](#) for the practice of social work around the world. COSW contributed to the Secretariat convened virtual roundtable on implementation of the Kigali Declaration on child care reform.



Regulation of social workers in Commonwealth countries is the focus of a new series of occasional webinars launched in 2023. Several Commonwealth countries already have statutory regulation of the profession, taking a variety of forms; this may include regulation of social work qualifications, regulation of social work practice and/or regulation of social work agencies. A number of countries are exploring different forms of recognition and regulation of the social work profession, including some or all of these elements.

The first webinar in March 2023 was convened by Kings College London as an [online witness seminar](#) as part of the Supporting Innovation in Adult Social Care SASCI research programme. Speakers included COSW Board Member David N Jones. The second webinar explored Regulating the Social Work Profession in South East Asia with Dr. [C. J. Paul](#), Past



President, Professional Social Workers' Association, Chennai, India & Mr. [Amarawansa Ranaweera](#), Past President, Sri Lanka Association of Professional

Social Workers. The next seminar will include the recognition of the social work profession in Zambia alongside other countries in Africa. In June, the Sri Lanka Association of Professional Social Workers (SLAPSW) and COSW held an online webinar on the social workers' response to the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, hosted by IFSW.

COMPARATIVE HISTORIES OF COMMONWEALTH SOCIAL WORK

COSW and the London University Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICWS), launched a global project to document the history and development of social work across the Commonwealth, in a partnership with The University of Edinburgh and King's College London. The aim is to develop a bid for a programme of funded research on this theme. In preparation for this a two-day online conference was held in March/April 2022 to identify key themes and potential collaborators for the bid.

This major study of the diverse histories of social work across the Commonwealth is expected to involve a partnership of Commonwealth universities alongside COSW and ICWS. The 2022 webinar set the scene for this bigger project, which comes at a significant moment in social work education, as the discourse on 'decolonising' the social work curriculum gathers momentum.

The poster features a blue header with the event title in white. Below the title, on the left, is a paragraph of text. On the right is a circular image of a historical black and white photograph showing a group of people in front of a building with a sign that reads 'S. MARYLENE DISPENSARY'. To the right of the image is a black circle with the dates '31 MARCH & 1 APRIL'. Below the image is a blue circle with the word 'ONLINE'. At the bottom left is a registration link. At the bottom right are logos for the Commonwealth Foundation, ICWS, and the School of Advanced Study at the University of London.

Comparative Histories of the Development of Social work across the Commonwealth

Join us to explore the diverse histories of social work across the Commonwealth as a foundation for a proposed major study.

The event includes context setting contributions from senior Commonwealth and academic figures and several presentations exploring the diverse histories of social work across the Commonwealth.

Register to attend via: commonwealth.sas.ac.uk/events/event/25888

31 MARCH & 1 APRIL

ONLINE

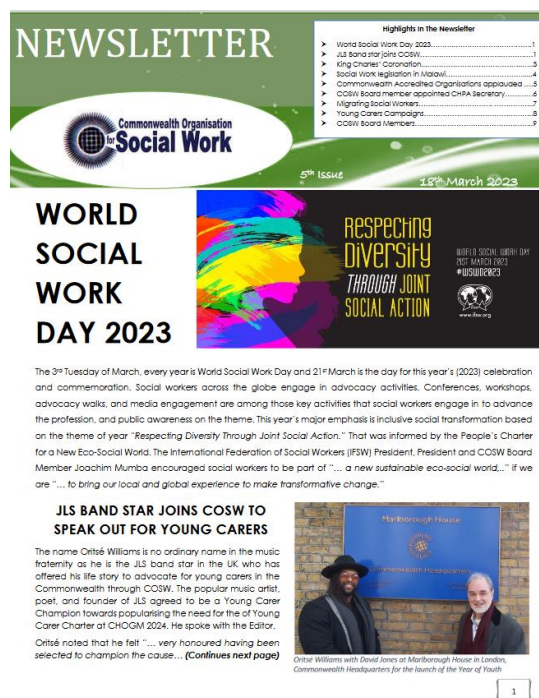
Commonwealth Foundation Social Work ICWS INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

The 2022 webinar included contributions from the COSW Chair, the Commonwealth Secretary General, the Director General of the Commonwealth Foundation and the Vice Chancellor of University of London. Papers were presented by contributors from Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Malaysia, India, Zambia and Zimbabwe, United Kingdom, Jamaica and Canada. All the proceedings are available as videos and were published as a special issue of the Bulletin of the Social Work History Network in February 2023, freely available online at <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/hscwru/assets/swhn/bulletin/2023/bulletin-of-the-swhn-2023-vol9-iss1.pdf>. The project has now moved to the stage of exploring funding options for the research and promoting new perspectives on this rich and diverse history.

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COMMUNICATIONS

The COSW website (www.cosw.info) was launched in March 2021 and has been regularly updated with news items and COSW developments (www.cosw.info/cosw-news).

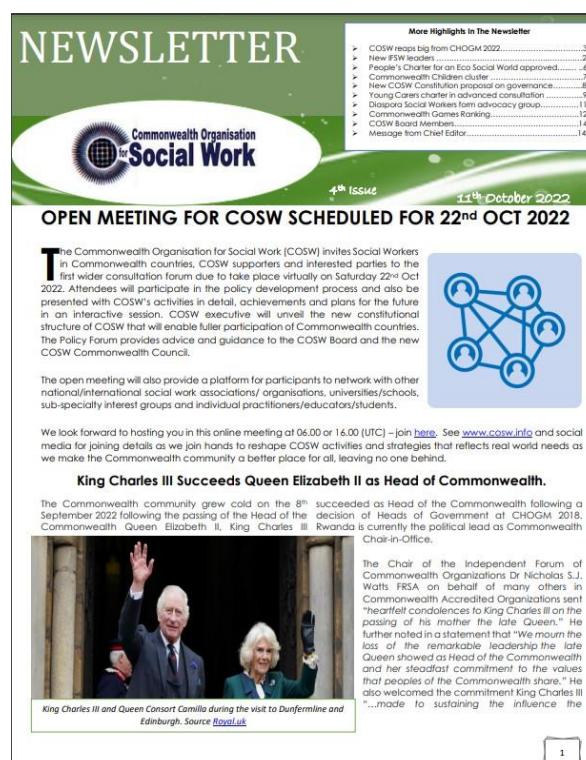


Press releases were issued on: the The People's Global Summit, 'Co-building a New Eco-Social World: Leaving No One Behind'; the death of Queen Elizabeth II; the first COSW Policy Forum; the climate emergency and the outcome of COP27; migration of social workers; respecting diversity through joint social action on social worker migration; Partnership with JLS star Oritsé Williams to promote the Commonwealth Young Carer Charter; Diversity is beauty – COSW statement celebrating World Social Work Day and Commonwealth Day; Young Carers Voices – International perspectives - webinar with Commonwealth Secretariat; Lifetime Achievement Award for COSW board member David N Jones; and deploring targeted ill-treatment of women in local and global conflicts.

COSW has Facebook and Twitter (@CwlthSocWk) accounts which promote Commonwealth as well as COSW activity.

COSW information is widely disseminated by the International Federation of Social Workers (www.ifsw.org), the British Association of Social Workers (www.basw.co.uk) and other national associations through websites and social media.

The PDF newsletter, edited by Gerald Okiria, published in October 2022 & March 2023 (www.cosw.info/newsletter), is available on the website. The annual report '[Commonwealth perspectives from social workers](#)' was published on the website and disseminated in October 2022.











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FINANCIAL REPORT

COSW has a bank account in the United Kingdom and a balance of under £1,000.00. As a company limited by guarantee, all financial accounts and relevant information is available on the Companies House (London) website.

Estimated COSW expenditure in the Commonwealth during 2021-2 was less than £1000.00, most of which was covered by donations. COSW acknowledges with thanks donations from BASW towards CHOGM expenses in 2022 and the N&TJ Fund supporting young carers.

COSW has limited access to funds and almost all activity is undertaken by Board members and others on a voluntary basis. The Board hopes to develop new sources of funds for projects in the coming years.

Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work (COSW)			
Executive Board			
Sylvia Daisy Romanus (India) Chair	Naomi Spencer (Australia) Honorary Board Secretary	Sharon-Rose Gittens (Barbados) Honorary Treasurer	David N Jones (UK) Main Representative to Commonwealth Institutions
			
Charles Mbugua (Kenya)	Jan Christianson-Wood (Canada)	Monique Auffrey (Canada)	Joachim Cuthbert Mumba (Zambia)
			
K. S. Ramesh (India)	Teoh Ai Hua (Malaysia)	Okiria Gerald (Uganda)	
