

45  
YEARS

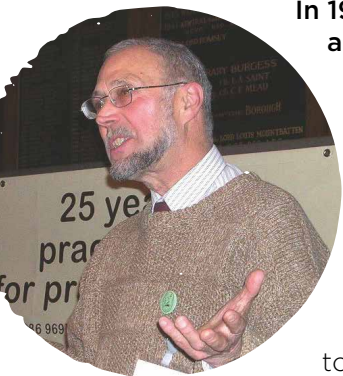
 **TOOLS FOR  
SELF RELIANCE**  
Practical help for practical people since 1980

# FORGING LINKS

NEWSLETTER  
SPRING 2025

Throughout its 45 year history, Tools for Self Reliance has had the same goal in mind – to empower youth and marginalised individuals to increase their financial resilience and standard of living. In this anniversary edition of Forging Links we look back on our humble beginnings, check in with current partners in Africa and take a peek at upcoming projects in the pipeline.

## IN THE BEGINNING



**In 1979, founder Glyn Roberts and a band of like-minded individuals came together with a single vision – to provide people with the equipment they needed to support their livelihoods.**

The call went out for donations – tools that were otherwise destined to linger unloved in garages or lie forever in a landfill. The first donated tools arrived at the Netley Marsh workshop and Tools for Self Reliance was born. A small army of volunteers gathered and equipped with limitless supplies of elbow grease and enthusiasm, they started our tool refurbishment programme.

Renovation of the workshop began; it was no small undertaking. Nothing more than a disused dog kennels, it needed to be partitioned with a goods in bay, machined shop, wood shop, sewing machine repair shop and mezzanine level for sewing machine storage and haberdashery, all of which still exists today. In 1984 Anne Woodhead began painting the iconic mural on our workshop wall; it took two years to complete.

In that same year we loaded our first ever shipping container. We used an antique mobile crane which later ended up in a museum! Tools and scrap metal were sent to Tanzania, to support budding trainees in blacksmithing and welding. As more tools arrived, we supplied more organisations across more countries.

With International Development high on the political agenda in the 80s and 90s, our efforts caught the eye of large funding organisations, and with the media focus on climate crisis in Africa, big name celebrities were ready to champion our cause.

We enjoyed significant growth in our regional volunteering groups, individual supporters and a leap in our tool shipping capabilities. External funding was available to cover shipping costs.

Fast forward to 2025 and the post-pandemic landscape looks very different. In a crowded charitable sector, there is fierce competition for funding and project costs have escalated.



Lenny Henry and Richard Briers promote Tools for Self Reliance in 1987

Inflation means securing resources – from raw materials to training provision – is more costly. Shipping costs have risen drastically, and we are having to evaluate the benefits of supplying projects with tools from the UK versus

fundraising so partners can buy tools in country. All these factors keep us on our toes, but we remain ambitious and are working as hard now as we did in those early years to help people build resilient livelihoods.

## NOT JUST TOOLS

**The development of our training projects started in 1983. We received funding from the EEC to start our Education and Evaluation programme with six themes focusing on a more democratic way of running our programme, skills training, using technology to empower participants, and reducing waste in the projects.**

Participants and our African partners weren't as greatly involved then, as they are now, with our programme development. Monitoring

the impact of training and mentorship is of paramount importance to us today. We take time to build relationships with carefully selected partner organisations to deliver quality training in trades that will support income generation, targeting youth populations, women, disabled people and ex-offenders. The impact on individuals is measured to help us build robust projects in the future. Our wrap-around activities, from childcare provision to meal provision – are empowering more individuals to balance family and household responsibilities with training. Equipped with vocational

skills, nationally recognised qualifications, business acumen and mentoring support, our trainees graduate with the skills and confidence to transition to work.

Our current suite of projects, in Ghana, Malawi, Uganda and Zambia, range from skills training in traditional workshop trades, to Business Development projects to help enterprises succeed in a competitive market place. Keep reading to meet some of the trainees building bright futures through learning and building networks within their communities.

## GHANA – SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE



Distributing OFSP vines

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beneficiaries from female-headed households in Northern Ghana with the means to increase household income and well-being through sustainable agriculture and agribusiness development.

Through a flexible vocational and business training schedule to fit around household and family responsibilities, the women have learned how to increase yield and profitability of shea butter and how to cultivate orange-fleshed sweet potatoes (OFSP) as a source of income and improved nutrition. They have received comprehensive training in organisational development, business management and marketing, and exchange visits to other producers enabled them to establish key market linkages.

Our project also introduced participants to the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) concept, enabling them to invest and borrow money from self-managed savings groups. The women graduated from our project empowered to take control of their financial future and work together to support their business development.

The SPRING project culminated in a closing ceremony attended by members of the Ghana Enterprise Agency, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the media, providing significant promotional opportunities for the women.

**A key component in our project planning is identifying viable opportunities for income generation at local community level.** Where the market for traditional vocational trades – such as bricklaying and carpentry – cannot support more graduates, we must work with communities to find other means of promoting livelihood development.

Our **Sustainable Project in Northern Ghana (SPRING)** with partner TRAX has provided 50



## Introducing Madam Valedibah, by Dorcas Zoogah, TRAX Programme Manager

Madam Valedibah is a hardworking woman known for her dedication to both her community and her family. When she joined the SPRING Project, she saw its potential not only for her own benefit but for others as well.

Inspired by the training she received, she took it upon herself to share potato vines with 10 other people in her community. She taught them how to cultivate OFSP, ensuring that more families could access the nutritional and economic benefits of the crop. She explained, *“I didn’t want to keep this knowledge to myself, I knew it could help others, just as it helped me”*.

Thanks to the income she generated from selling the roots, she was able to pay her children’s school fees. The financial relief and sense of empowerment she gained from the project has been life-changing.

Today, Madam Valedibah continues to expand her impact, encouraging others to take advantage of the knowledge and resources provided by the SPRING Project. She remains an inspiring figure, proving that one person’s dedication can uplift an entire community. *“OFSP has changed my life”*, she said with pride. And now, it’s changing the lives of others too.



Following the project’s success, we are excited to be working with TRAX to deliver sustainable agriculture training to a new cohort of trainees, starting in 2025. Look out for our updates over the coming weeks.

## ZAMBIA - VOCATIONAL TRAINING & BUSINESS SKILLS

Fifty young people aged 18-24 years have graduated from our project in Ndola with KEVTC. The project was specifically designed to support individuals from female headed households, many of whom are young mothers, who are also vulnerable to the increased competition for employment amongst Zambia’s disproportionately young population.

Thirty women have completed a robust programme of vocational training in tailoring and hairdressing, complemented by a holistic package of business skills, literacy and numeracy training and sexual health and reproductive rights training. A further twenty men and women received Business Development training to increase the efficiency and earning capacity of their existing businesses. As the project comes to an end, our participants are graduating with key skills, such as understanding of profit and loss, budgeting and forecasting, customer

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Graduates of our training project with KEVTC

acquisition and retention which will support their long term and sustainable success. They are equipped to showcase their creativity, professionalism,

and expertise, and are best positioned to establish their own business based on their vocational skill set or become freelance professionals.



## Mwape Chibipile - Vocational Training in Tailoring

Mwape's formal education ended after she completed her lower secondary examinations in 2020. Like many young women in her community, she faced limited opportunities and spent most of her time at home. To bring in a little money to meet basic needs and buy toiletries, Mwape started selling fritters and samosas. But she wanted to find a way to build a sustainable livelihood and be financially independent.

Mwape had an interest in sewing and design and was thrilled when she was selected for our tailoring training project. She learned to cut and sew a wide range of garments, from skirts and blouses, to work suits, and uniforms. In November, Mwape and her classmates each received a refurbished sewing machine. Mwape was delighted! She told us *"When I start working with the sewing machine, the sewing machine will birth other sewing machines as time goes such as an over-locking machine. I have an interest design, if I was to elevate this skill, I would love to learn clothing designing at a more professional level, sit through classes and develop my own future brand"*

Mwape dreams of resuming her education and perhaps joining the military. With her tailoring skills she has the means to earn an income, save for her future and make her dreams a reality.



### GIFTS IN WILLS

Your legacy will help young people, women and vulnerable communities gain the skills and tools they need to thrive. Building a livelihood matters to you, it matters to us, and it matters to our trainees. What better legacy to leave, than gifting someone their future? **Visit our website to find out more or email [info@tfsr.org](mailto:info@tfsr.org) today to help change a life tomorrow.**

## GHANA - BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

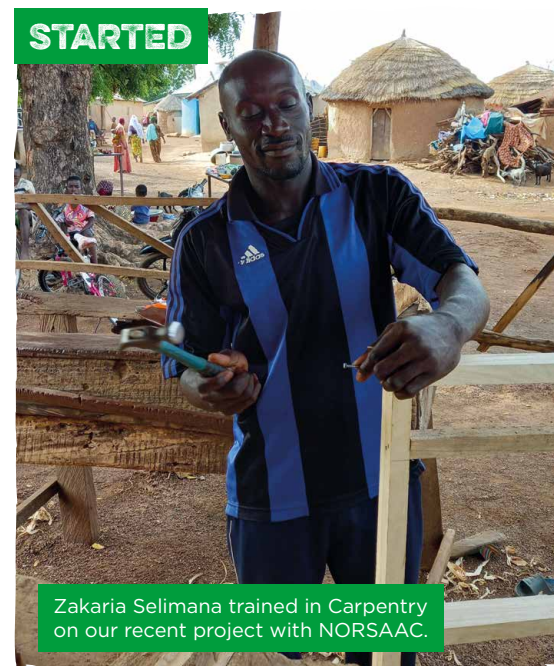
**In Northern Ghana, where 72% of the population live under the international poverty line, there are limited opportunities for people to earn a living, particularly for those who have few or no qualifications and therefore can't access government run training courses.** As a result, individuals often enter a trade self-taught. These untrained or informally trained men and women often have difficulty securing a consistent and high enough income in a competitive market due to their limited practical and business skills, compounded by limited access to high quality, durable tools.

Our **Business Development project with NORSAAC** will upskill 30 people already working in Tamale, Northern Ghana, to support their business growth and increased earning and savings capacity. Tailors, bricklayers and individuals

working in construction will be needs assessed to identify any gaps in their technical skills and will receive top-up vocational skills training under the supervision of selected experts running successful businesses in each respective trade.

Whilst the skills training will be delivered in local business workshops, participants will return to NORSAAC's training centre for Business Development training. Topics will include bookkeeping, profit & loss calculation, marketing and customer relations. At the end of the training, participants will receive business grants to invest in strengthening their businesses.

Following the training delivery, NORSAAC will conduct regular visits to each business to provide mentoring support, advice and troubleshooting and record changes in business performance



and individuals' financial resilience and personal wellbeing.



**We look forward to sharing stories about our trainees over the coming months.**

# MALAWI – TRANSITION TO WORK



The Muomboli Project launched in February 2024, to deliver vocational training

in tailoring, hairdressing and solar & electrical installation, trades that offer genuine opportunities for women to succeed in business. In addition to learning trade skills and undertaking work-placements, the women were introduced to basic business management concepts and received Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) training so they could both contribute to a communal fund and benefit from small loans to meet financial challenges or invest in their business enterprises.

A year on, the women are starting to build their savings and are reporting significantly improved financial wellbeing. However, the post pandemic economy in Malawi remains competitive and inflation currently stands at 32.4%. This means the cost of food, materials, transport and renting a shop are high, making it even harder for people trying to establish a business to succeed. To ensure the women are equipped to succeed in their trades, we are offering our **Transition to Work** follow-on project to all 50 graduates, with the aim of supporting them as they transition from training into the workplace.

COMING ONLINE



Participants of the Muomboli project receiving their start-up kits

Working as solo traders or forming business groups with fellow graduates, our newly qualified women will bring together all their skills and experience to achieve financial resilience and personal wellbeing. The FESODEV team will provide career guidance, signposting to job-finding services, facilitate direct employment linkages with local businesses and generally support the women with their business development.

Trainees will receive monthly visits from staff to conduct

individual needs assessments and implement targeted top-up vocational training to fill any gaps in the women's technical knowledge. In addition, the women will receive mentorship support to work through any difficulties they encounter, and guidance and strategies for moving forward. A major component of the project is the disbursement of a business start-up grant to each graduate to invest in their business, whether to buy more tools or equipment, help with premises overheads or purchase materials and stock.



## Efrida Saidi – Tailoring graduate

Efrida is a mother who had no formal skills or qualifications. Without a job or a business of her own she was struggling to provide for her family and feel fulfilled as a person. Efrida joined the Muomboli project and began her journey as a tailor. Now she designs and sews clothes for her neighbours and school uniforms for their children. With the means to earn her own money, Efrida is able to support herself, her children, and even helping her siblings. Efrida's skills are well recognised within her community and she has developed her self-identity.

From the money she has earned selling garments, Efrida has already saved money to buy a table for her sewing machine, which she operates with a hand crank. Now she is saving to buy a treadle to speed up production. Efrida is looking to rent a shop at the local trading centre so she can take advantage of high customer footfall and increase her earnings, she told us: ***"I am very grateful to this project and all those who have financially supported to make this project happen. This project has given me a job to do"***.

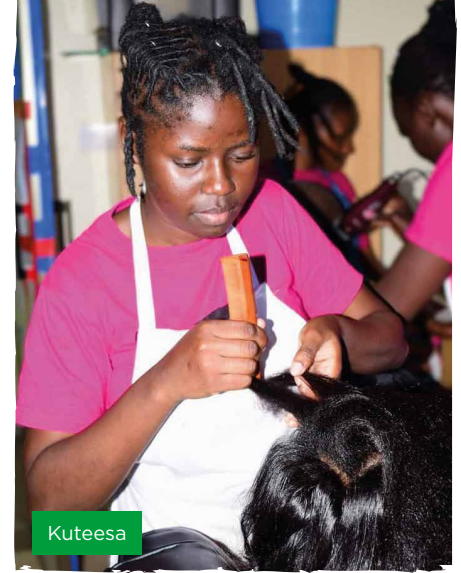
## UGANDA – A NEW APPROACH TO TOOL PROVISION

The number of tools that have passed through our workshops is phenomenal. In the last 45 years we have shipped more than 300,000 tools to 7 different countries. But the landscape of tool provision is changing. Shipping costs have risen dramatically and some of our countries have imposed strict regulations on what can and cannot enter the country. Uganda, for example, has increased the levy on imported second hand tools making it untenable for us to ship supplies there.

Graduates of our latest vocational training project with **TA Crusade** each leave with a start-up tool kit to support their trade. Historically, we have shipped auto-mechanics, masonry, welding and plumbing tools from the UK, by sea as far

as Dar es Salaam and then by road to landlocked Uganda. The journey is lengthy and expensive. This year, for the first time, the necessary equipment has been secured in country. TA Crusade's Executive Director, Ronald Lutaaya, told us *"This project has been a groundbreaking initiative for us, as it is our first time equipping all trades with start-up tool kits procured locally. We believe that this approach has not only supported the local economy but also ensured that the tools are suitable for the local context and readily available for maintenance and replacement"*.

This approach means we can support a wider range of trades. Kuteesa Robinah is already earning an income from her hairdressing training. She told us she has mastered hair



Kuteesa

braiding and twisting; knotting, cornrows and dreadlocks; hair relaxing and straightening, plus blow drying and flat ironing. As she develops more advanced hairdressing techniques, Kuteesa will be able to invest some of her earnings in purchasing hairdressing equipment locally. She told us, *"I spend on my upkeep, family welfare as well as reinvest into hairdressing consumables that customers buy from me for a profit"*.

## ZAMBIA – A PILOT PROJECT FOR PRISONERS

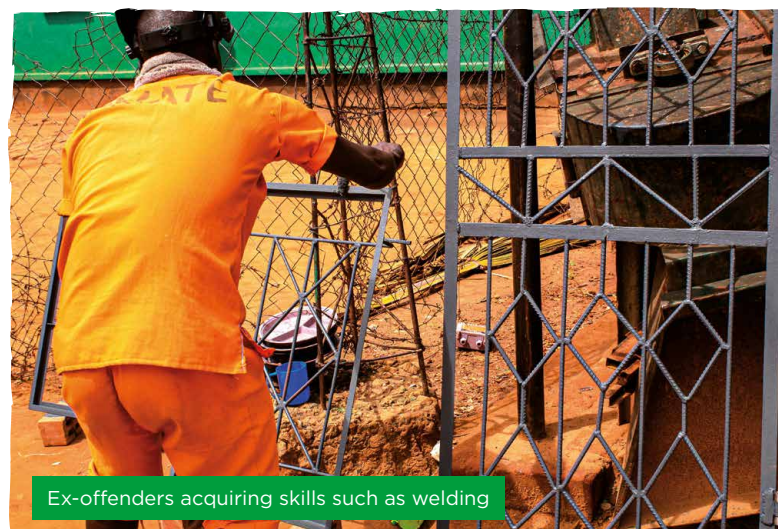


Launching our project with PFF

We are widening the scope of our project beneficiaries. Our project with Prisoners' Future Foundation (PFF) is helping inmates of Mumbwa Correction Centre prepare for meaningful employment post-release. 50 ex-offenders of non-violent crimes are learning agriculture and poultry rearing, bricklaying, carpentry, metal fabrication or tailoring.

Equipped with the means to earn an income, the men and women will be better placed to return to their families and take an active role in community life. During their training, project participants will undertake activities such as fixing classroom chairs and tables, and making school uniforms, helping to showcase their skills and challenge beliefs that inmates cannot be make meaningful contributions to society. One of our participants talked to us about working with his fellow welding trainees.

He told us, *"Since joining the training, my experience has been positive. My attendance has been consistent, and I have gained valuable skills in welding. I have learned how to fabricate various items such as chair frames, window frames, window burglar bars, and grill doors. As a group, we can reinvest a portion of the profits earned from the sale of fabricated items... ..fostering financial responsibility and self-sufficiency among trainees"*.



Ex-offenders acquiring skills such as welding

# UK PROGRAMME – VOLUNTEERING IN FOCUS

## South Shropshire & Borders Volunteer Group – 33 years of service

Based on a farm in the rolling hills of Shropshire, the group have been supporting our work since 1992. They have produced over 50 tool kits for our Africa projects and have raised over £44,000! The group was set up by Dave and Liz Thomlinson after first hearing about us on the radio. Dave was inspired to set up a group when working as a Recycling Officer. Liz and Dave engaged interested people when running their stall at a local music festival and later started their volunteers list. The inaugural group meeting took place at a local Quaker meeting house in Newtown. During the meeting, a member offered up the use of a nearby school to base themselves, and so the group became a reality.

Eventually they needed a bigger space, and so for the past 25 years they have been working out of a farm building in Aston on Clun, which has been kindly provided by friends that own the property. The group of 12 members do not pay rent, though earn their keep helping with certain maintenance jobs on the farm.

The group has flexed to support the charity as our project needs have changed. Between them they undertake collections of tools, sewing machines and haberdashery donations and refurbish items for mixed toolboxes and complete kits. Importantly they also fundraise for our projects through eBay, community sale events and scrap metal. Dave's favourite part of volunteering is turning up for the weekly refurbishing sessions at the workshop, which has given him *“improved quality of life”*, particularly as he feels the *“The group is going better than ever – with many talented people”*.



## CALLING ALL TFSR ALUMNI

Volunteering has always been at the heart of Tools for Self Reliance. For many decades we enjoyed hosting long term volunteers with Erasmus, etc. Sadly, Britain's departure from the EU severed our ties with the European Volunteering Service and our last LTV waved goodbye in March 2023.

**Were you a Tools for Self Reliance volunteer?** Tell us your stories to feature in our Autumn edition – email [fundraising@tfsr.org](mailto:fundraising@tfsr.org)

## HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT TOOLS FOR SELF RELIANCE

### 1. Give money



Your one-off donation or regular gift will help us deliver more targeted training

to youths and marginalised communities and change more trainees lives.

### 2. Donate the right tools



Overseas tool shipments are making up less of our project expenditure but you

can still support our work by donating tools that link to our training projects.

We will continue to support specific trades with refurbished tools where shipping is a viable option. If you have unwanted workshop tools that can support a trade, we would be happy to hear from you.

Call us on 02380 869697 to find details of a regional volunteer who can collect or whom you can take your donations to. Please check our tool list on our website or call us to find out which tools we need.

### 3. Support Brighter futures

**We are thrilled to announce our new collaboration with Building Heroes**, a charity

dedicated to supporting ex-service personnel into employment. This partnership enables us to supply low-cost building and carpentry kits for their trainees, helping veterans transition into meaningful careers in construction and beyond.

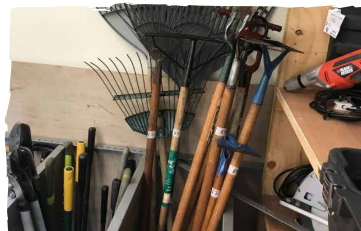
We are also providing **start-up tool kits to newly qualified graduates and apprentices**. If you – or someone you know – is in need of a start-up tool kit, email [info@tfsr.org](mailto:info@tfsr.org) to find out more. Your donations not only back our programme in Africa, but contribute to empowering those here in the UK too.

## 4. Buy our surplus stock

Tools for Self Reliance is committed to keeping good quality tools in circulation and out of landfill. And surplus tools are a valuable, and increasingly critical, means of generating income to help fund our work.

In 2025 we are excited to be **expanding our on-site shop**, which has already generated almost £6,000 since it opened in May last year. The shop is open every Monday and Thursday. For updated times and events visit our website.

And finally, don't forget to keep a regular check on our **eBay listings**, from specialist tools to rare sewing patterns and machine parts.



## GET INVOLVED – SHOP, SUPPORT & CELEBRATE



### Craft2Craft Workshops

#### Easter Flowers workshop | Thursday 10th April

Make a spring flower – a tulip or a daffodil – or just bring your imagination if you want to make something else! All materials (and cake) provided.

#### Make an apron | Thursday 19th June

Make an adults or a child's apron (or both if you're quick). All materials provided but please bring your own sewing machine if possible.

#### Cross Stitch Cards | Thursday 17th July

Work from a kit or choose your own design.

**How to book:** All Craft2Craft events are held on the first floor of our **Netley Marsh workshop** (Ringwood Road, SO40 7GY), 2pm – 4pm. Tickets are £15 per person including material, hot drink and cake. Please call us on 02380 869697 or email [fundraising@tfsr.org](mailto:fundraising@tfsr.org) to secure your tickets and for any enquiries about accessibility.

### Upcoming Sales

We host exciting seasonal sales at our HQ, where you can pick up high-quality refurbished tools while directly contributing to our life-changing projects:

**Spring Tool & Haberdashery Sale | Saturday 5th April 10am – 12 noon** | A treasure trove of tools including electrical, DIY, hand tools, haberdashery, sewing machines and garden tools.

**Tools for Self Reliance Shop** | Visit our shop on Mondays and Thursdays for a wide selection of haberdashery, sewing notions, workshop and garden tools. Visit our website for up-to-date opening times.

### Across the UK

**Bodgers Ball | 10th & 11th May**  
Avoncroft museum, Worcestershire

**New Forest Folk Festival | 2nd – 6th July**  
Plaitford, New Forest

**New Forest Show | 29th – 31st July**  
Brockenhurst, New Forest

**Oak Fair | 23rd & 24th August**  
Stock Gaylard, Dorset

## PREFER TO GO DIGITAL?

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