DREAM LAB
FOUNDATION

2025 Annual Report

1 January - 31 December 2025

Dream Lab Foundation

Registered charity no. 1205675
(England and Wales)

DREAM LAB FOUNDATION

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Unlocking potential.
Igniting futures.

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Letter from our Chair & CEO

Dream Lab® steps into the classroom!

Last year, we said 2025 would be the year Dream Lab® moved into schools. **And it was!**

Around **1,000 young people aged 13–17** took part in Dream Lab® across three secondary schools in Johannesburg South, with **18 teachers and teaching assistants** trained to deliver the programme.

For us, this was an exciting milestone: seeing teachers take ownership of Dream Lab® and bring it into their classrooms, and hearing young people talk about what they discovered about themselves, the new possibilities they could see, and the practical steps they could take towards their own futures.

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Just as importantly, **we listened**. Feedback from learners and educators is helping us strengthen Dream Lab® for South African schools and shape what comes next.

Thank you to every learner, educator, partner, and volunteer who made this such a special year. And thank *you* for believing in young people's dreams. We hope you enjoy seeing what we've been up to in 2025!

With love,



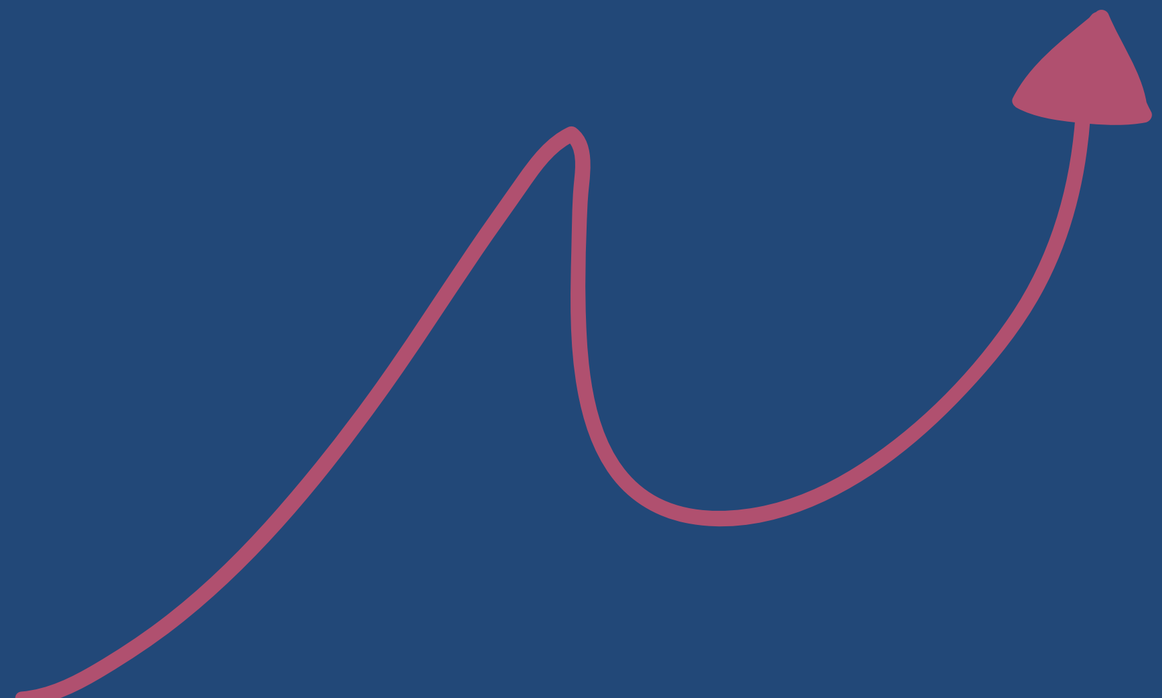
Michael Pluess
Chair of Trustees & Co-founder



Karen Pluess
CEO & Co-founder

DREAM LAB FOUNDATION

Trustees' Annual Report 2025



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Who we are

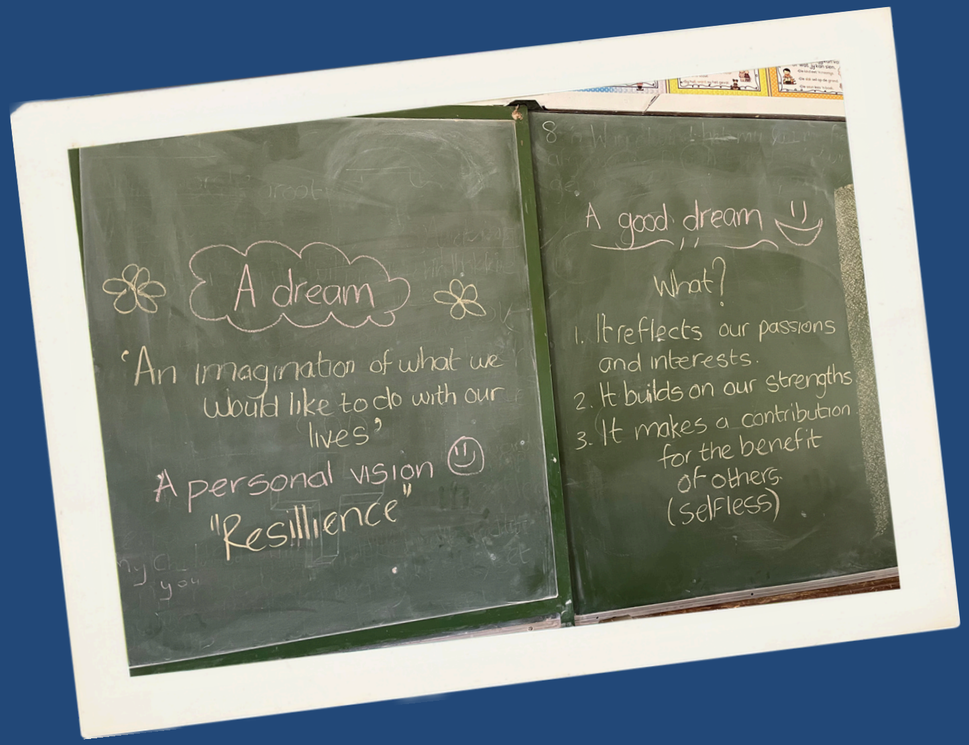
We nurture young people's dreams.

Our values

- 🖤 Love
- 🧠 Expertise
- 🤝 Partnership
- 🚀 Being explorers

By helping young people discover who they are, believe in what is possible, and take practical steps towards the future they want to build.

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Young people need to see what's possible

Where opportunities feel limited or out of reach, it can be difficult for young people to imagine a positive future for themselves.

The reality for young people in South Africa

~40%
leave school before Grade 12 (matric)[1]

58.5%
youth unemployment[2]

70%
reported needing help with their mental well-being[3]

Why we exist

Opportunities matter. So does believing they're possible for you. >>>

Sources: [1] Zero Dropout Campaign/DGMT, 2024 publication · [2] Statistics SA, QLFS Q3 2025 (ages 15-24) · [3] UNICEF SA U-Report, 2023 (ages 15-24)

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Our approach

It starts with a dream.

DEVELOP VISION

Imagine a positive future and a path towards it.

BUILD RESILIENCE

Develop the skills and mindset to navigate challenges.

ACCESS OPPORTUNITY

Connect dreams with real-world possibilities.

Grounded in research

Dream Lab® is grounded in psychological research and shaped with input from young people, educators, and psychologists.

EXPERTISE
Research matters to us.

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“Before Dream Lab®, I didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life. Now I have a clear path, I know the steps I need to take, and I feel confident about my future.”

— Dream Lab® graduate, 2025

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Dream Lab® in schools

In 2025, we changed how Dream Lab® is delivered.

Dream Lab® moved into schools, **putting the programme in the hands of teachers**. Across three secondary schools in Johannesburg South, Gauteng province, we tested and adapted the model in real school settings.

Delivered by teachers **as part of Life Orientation lessons during the school day**, this model has the potential to make Dream Lab® **more sustainable, accessible and scalable** – an important step towards reaching many more young people.

Our 2025 activities were made possible by UK Government funding through our partnership with the University of Surrey.

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2025 at a glance

3
secondary schools

~1,000
young people reached

~270 hours
of Dream Lab® sessions

18
teachers & teaching assistants trained

Grades 8-10 · 26 classes · ages 13-17

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We didn’t just deliver. We listened.

Throughout 2025, **we gathered data and feedback from learners and educators** to understand what worked, what needed to change, and how Dream Lab® could better work within the South African school context.

Pre/post surveys (quantitative)
Learner interviews · Focus groups · Educator interviews (qualitative)

In July, teachers and school leaders came together with research and South African government partners to reflect on what we were learning and **help shape the next iteration of Dream Lab®**.

Further analysis of the 2025 data continues in 2026.



🚀 BEING EXPLORERS
Stay curious. Keep learning.

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Some of what young people told us in 2025.

"These activities were like keys that unlocked potential dreams we didn't even know we had inside us, showing us possibilities we had never considered."

"I discovered I have more potential and I've been underestimating myself."

"Dream Lab® helped me develop proper goals for the future, which gave me direction... I'm not just doing things for the sake. I've developed small steps that will help me achieve my big goal."



What learners told us

♥ LOVE
Young people first.

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Seeing learners differently

And educators.

Educators valued seeing a different side of learners they teach every day – hearing their dreams, seeing new possibilities emerge, and watching them think more concretely about their futures.

"They enjoyed talking about their dreams, what they want to do in life ... they outlined their dreams. For me, it was so beautiful."
— Dream Lab® educator, 2025

Reflecting on their own dreams

"Dream Lab® really also assisted me to reflect on my own dreams as a person, as a parent, as a teacher."
— Dream Lab® educator, 2025

What educators told us

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Our partners

We're better when we work together, playing to each other's strengths. Thank you to everyone who opened doors, shared their ideas and expertise, and learned alongside us this year.

Schools & educators
Diversity High School · Glenvista High School · The Hill High School

Research
University of Johannesburg · University of Surrey

Government
South African Department of Basic Education · Gauteng Department of Education

🤝 PARTNERSHIP
Playing to our strengths.

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Looking ahead to 2026



- **Advance the research**

  Continue analysing the 2025 data to deepen our understanding of learner experiences and outcomes, and prepare findings for publication.

- **Refine Dream Lab®**

  Use these insights to strengthen the programme and its delivery across different ages and school settings.

- **Prepare for wider delivery**

  Establish new partnerships with schools across Gauteng and build the funding and capacity needed for future rollout.

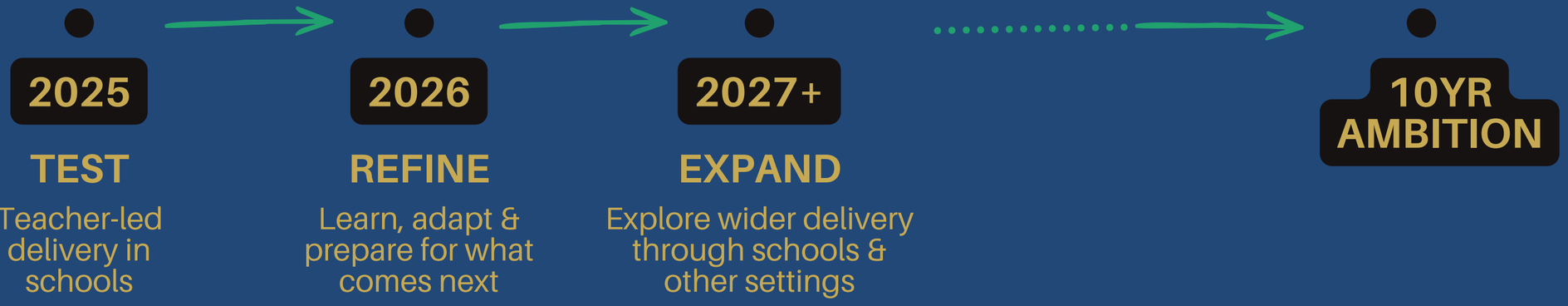
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OUR BIG DREAM

1 million young people in 10 years.

Not scale for scale's sake.

We want Dream Lab® to be available to every young person, helping them realise their potential and contribute to a better world. That means developing a low-cost, evidence-informed model that can work through existing systems.



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Financial review & governance

£11.2k income · £3.3k expenditure · £9.6k closing funds

2025 income came primarily through our partnership with the University of Surrey, supported by **UK Government Higher Education Innovation Fund funding.** Expenditure supported our charitable activities, alongside governance and fundraising costs.

Dream Lab Foundation remained **entirely volunteer-led, with no paid staffing costs during the year**, contributing to the charity's year-end balance of **£9.6k in unrestricted funds**.

Reserves

The trustees aim to maintain a **minimum reserves level of £600**, equivalent to approximately six months' core operating costs. Year-end funds were above this minimum, providing capacity to support **future charitable activities and organisational development.**

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Risk management

The trustees have identified the charity's key risks as:

- **financial sustainability in the charity's early years**;
- **reliance on a small volunteer base**;
- **safeguarding and the welfare of young people participating in our programmes**; and
- **the operational risks of international delivery**.

We manage these risks through **careful financial oversight**, **appropriate safeguarding arrangements**, and **close collaboration with schools and trusted local organisations**, including academic institutions and government bodies. We operate on a project-by-project basis, **keeping activity proportionate to available funding and capacity**, while seeking to broaden our funding base and organisational capacity over time.

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Structure, governance & management

Dream Lab Foundation is a **Charitable Incorporated Organisation** (**CIO**), registered with the Charity Commission in November 2023 and governed by its constitution.

Trustees are appointed for skills and experience relevant to the charity's work, receive an induction to the charity and their responsibilities, and are responsible for its **strategy, governance and financial oversight**. Day-to-day activities are managed by the founding team under trustee oversight.

As the charity develops, we aim to **broaden the Board's skills and perspectives**, including representation from the countries in which we work.

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Charitable objects & public benefit

The trustees confirm that they have had due regard to the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit in accordance with Section 17 of the Charities Act 2011. During 2025, these objects were advanced primarily through the delivery and development of Dream Lab® in secondary schools in South Africa.



Our charitable objects

"To advance the education of young people, and to advance them in life, by developing their skills, capacities and capabilities to enable them to participate in society as independent mature and responsible individuals in particular but not exclusively, through personal development programmes and courses, resources, and advice, and by facilitating access to employment, volunteering and training opportunities."

DREAM LAB FOUNDATION

Trustees' responsibilities

Trustees are responsible for preparing the Trustees' Report and financial statements in accordance with applicable law and UK accounting standards. They must ensure proper records are kept and that the accounts give a true and fair view of the charity's affairs.

The Trustee's report was approved by the Board of Trustees on 5 October 2026, and signed on its behalf by:



Michael Pluess
Chair of Trustees
5 October 2026



Charlene Chen
Trustee (Treasurer)
7 October 2026

DREAM LAB FOUNDATION

Annual Accounts 2025

For the period 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025

DREAM LAB FOUNDATION

Receipts and payments account

For the period 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025

Receipts	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
Donations	432.20	-	**432.20**
Charitable activities	10,795.00	-	**10,795.00**
Other income	0.13	-	**0.13**
Total receipts	**11,227.33**	-	**11,227.33**

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Receipts and payments account (continued)

For the period 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025

Payments	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
Charitable activities	3,003.19	-	**3,003.19**
Raising funds	88.57	-	**88.57**
Governance costs	228.72	-	**228.72**
Total payments	**3,320.48**	**-**	**3,320.48**

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Receipts and payments account (continued)

For the period 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025

Net of receipts/(payments)	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £
Net of receipts/(payments)	7,906.85	-	7,906.85 surplus

Net movement in funds	Total funds £
Cash funds at start of period (1 January 2025)	1,675.46
Cash funds at end of period (31 December 2025)	9,582.31

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Statement of assets and liabilities

As at 31 December 2025

Assets	£
Cash at bank	9,582.31
Total assets	**9,582.31**

Liabilities	£
Total liabilities	-

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Notes to the accounts

1. Basis of accounting
These accounts have been prepared on the Receipts and Payments basis, in accordance with the Charities SORP (FRS 102) for small charities, as permitted for charities with gross income under £250,000.

2. Nature of funds
All funds at 31 December 2025 are unrestricted and available to be used at the trustees' discretion to further the charity's objects.

3. Reserves policy
The trustees aim to maintain a minimum reserves level of £600, equivalent to approximately six months' core operating costs, to ensure the charity can continue to operate through short-term funding gaps or unexpected expenses. At 31 December 2025, unrestricted funds were £9,582.31, above this minimum. The reserves level will be reviewed annually.

4. Trustees' remuneration and expenses
No trustee received remuneration or expenses during the period.

5. Related party transactions
There were no related party transactions in the period.

As the charity's gross income is under £25,000, no independent examination or audit is required. One can be undertaken post-publication or upon request if required by funders or partners.

Approved by the trustees on 5 October 2026.



Michael Pluess
Chair of Trustees



Charlene Chen
Trustee (Treasurer)

DREAM LAB FOUNDATION

Legal & Administrative Details

Charity name: Dream Lab Foundation
Charity registration number: 1205675

Registered address: Flat 17 Bovet Court, 164 Harford Street, London E1 4GE, UK

Board of trustees:
Michael Pluess (Chair, appointed 10 November 2023)
Charlene Chen (Treasurer, appointed 10 November 2023)
Hannah Elwyn (Safeguarding Lead, appointed 10 November 2023)
Tobias Fluck (appointed 10 November 2023)
Katherine Tait (appointed 10 November 2023)

Management:
Karen Pluess (CEO & Co-founder)

Principal bankers: Barclays Bank

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“I discovered aspects of myself that I never knew existed.”

— Dream Lab® graduate, 2025

Thank You

For believing in young people’s dreams.

SCAN ME

CONTACT US

karen@dreamlabfoundation.org

www.dreamlabfoundation.org