



# 2025 Mid-Year Charities Update: HLI's first mid-year charities update and how we're changing the way we keep donors informed

2025 has already been an exciting and busy year for the Happier Lives Institute. We had [a chapter published in the World Happiness Report](#), which was accompanied by [a series of blogs](#) and a media campaign. This is also the first year we have a [larger selection of charity recommendations](#).

A further way we're planning to be more useful to donors is by providing a mid-year update on our thinking and by including news from the charities. Previously, we've focused on annual updates, primarily about cost-effectiveness, but felt that gap was too long, and we also wanted to give more details about what the charities are doing - even if these don't change our recommendations. Hence, our mid-year 2025 update about the charities.

Here we highlight:

- Our new "Living Review of WELLBY Cost-Effectiveness Analyses". This is an extension of our chapter for the World Happiness Report. We want to continue having an up to date reference point for charity WELLBY cost-effectiveness analyses from ourselves and other authors.
- A summary and some general updates about our recommendations. Notably, a new category of 'Honourable Mention' you might have seen.
- Some news about each charity we recommend. Typically this includes information about what they are doing and updated funding gaps. We also have done a slight update to our Pure Earth numbers. Sadly, cuts to USAID have affected directly or indirectly the charities we support.

## Living review

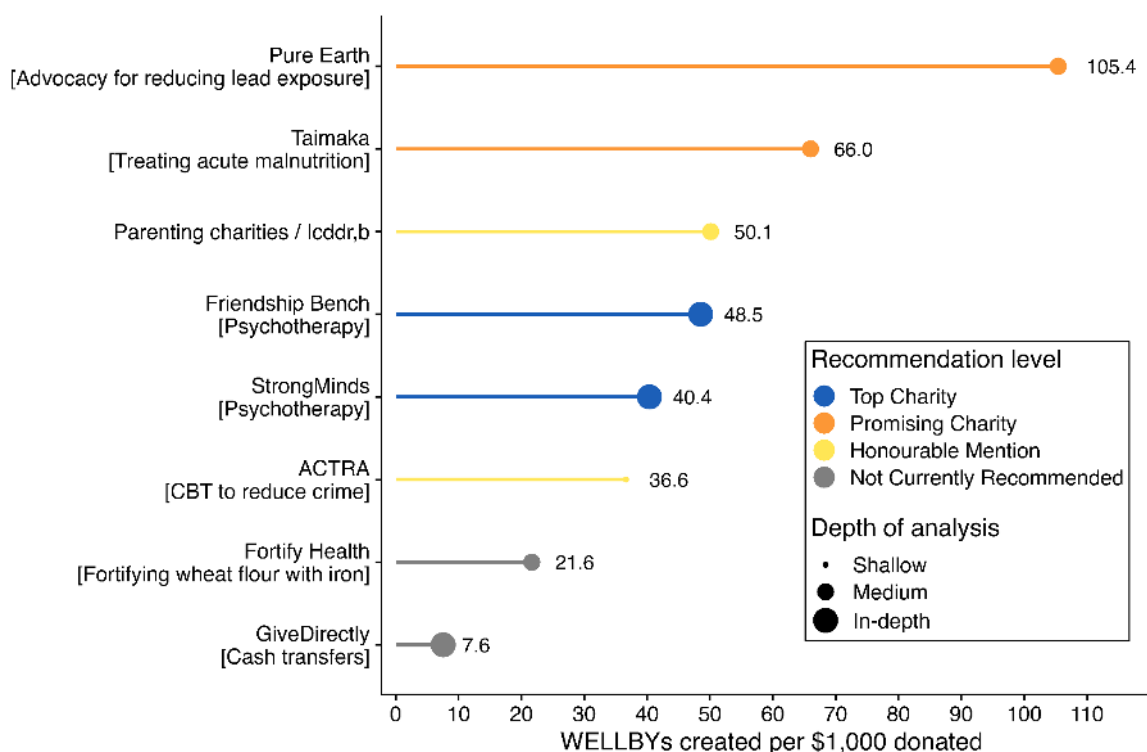
We're thrilled to announce the publication of the [Living Review of WELLBY Cost-Effectiveness Analyses](#), an exciting extension of our chapter in the 2025 World Happiness Report. This project curates and compares how effectively charities improve lives using [WELLBYs](#) (wellbeing-adjusted life years, where 1 WELLBY is the equivalent of a 1-point increase on a 0-10 wellbeing scale for a year). Drawing on evaluations from four independent evaluators – not just ourselves – this resource empowers donors, policymakers, and researchers to direct funding where it can do the most good. As new analyses emerge, this review will grow, making it an evolving, evidence-based tool for maximising happiness around the world.



## General updates

### Current recommendations and introduction of the honourable mention

In case you didn't see it yet – our current recommendations are summarised in the figure below, where we show the cost-effectiveness of charities in terms of [WELLBYs](#) created per \$1,000 donated. By donating to our recommended charities we estimate [you are having 150 times or more impact](#) than donating to typical charities in high-income countries like the UK.



You'll notice on our website that we have a new recommendation level, [Honourable Mentions](#). These are special cases that we think are likely cost-effective, but we don't have sufficient material to make a recommendation, so we don't feel able to categorise them as either a Top or Promising Charity, the two categories of recommendation we currently use. The point of Honourable Mentions is to alert donors to charities they might want to support if they are particularly interested in an area and they are happy with taking a bit more of a high-risk, hopefully high-reward strategy.

Here are the two current Honourable Mentions explained:

#### (1) Acción Transformadora (ACTRA)

ACTRA provides group therapy to young men with violent or criminal backgrounds in order to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in Latin America.

ACTRA delivers a very similar programme to [NEPI](#) except without the cash transfer and in Latin America. [Our evaluation](#) of its cost-effectiveness is a very shallow prediction using our



modelling for NEPI but updating it with ACTRA's relevant information. We estimate a predictive cost-effectiveness of 37 WELLBYs created per \$1,000 donated (or \$27 per WELLBY).

## (2) Parenting charities

We [find charities that improve parenting practices could be very cost-effective](#) (50 WELLBYs created per \$1,000 donated). However, we have yet to find a funding opportunity.

In the report, we mention Reach Up's ICDDR,B programme, but there is currently no available option to directly fund this programme.

Donors interested in this topic might want to donate to these kinds of charities. We are currently looking for a parenting charity to evaluate.

## Badges

You might have also noticed that some of the charities we recommend are now proudly wearing the HLI badge of recommendation!



## Charity-specific updates

### Funding shortfalls and USAID

We have asked each of our recommended charities about their funding gaps – that is, how much money they can still absorb to provide their services. Each of them still needs (and can absorb) funding to do more of the good work they are doing. *All these funding gap numbers are accurate as of writing.*

The tragic cuts to USAID (which we have written about [here](#) and [here](#)) has affected our recommended charities directly or indirectly. For some, this means they have lost funding directly, increasing their funding gap. For others, they have lost prospective funding because



fundings have had to fill urgent gaps in other humanitarian projects that have lost USAID (and other) funding.

**These cuts will lead to an avoidable loss of human life and wellbeing. It also represents a need for each of us to step up and directly support good charity work in the world.**

## Friendship Bench

[Friendship Bench](#)'s funding gap for 2025 and 2026 is currently \$3.6 million. This is \$238,000 left for 2025 and \$3.3 million left for 2026 (based on projections from Friendship Bench). USAID cuts lead to a loss of \$0.2 million (or ~5% of their total 2025 budget).

While they managed to raise some funds to close the 5% gap in their budget caused by USAID cuts, they have a larger mid- to long-term gap. Friendship Bench lost a large portion of the funding pipeline for a pilot strategy for collaboration with the Zimbabwe Government to deliver mental health treatment, which has had some impact on staffing. Friendship Bench is actively looking for ways to be more operationally efficient in light of the changes to the aid space.

Friendship Bench is working on scaling collaboration with the government of Zimbabwe. They've obtained a commitment from the government to work with them over the next five years to integrate the Friendship Bench model to all levels of psychosocial care in Zimbabwe's 10 provinces. The next steps in this project are:

- Determining a theory of change with the government and mapping the intervention plan over the next few years (including what funding and tools are needed).
- Train people to deliver the Friendship Bench model (and collect data about impact) at a national level using their 'Friendship Bench in a Box' programme.
- Piloting the delivery in collaboration with the government over the next three years. This will happen in the following three provinces: Masvingo, Harare, and Mashonaland Central.

**It remains to be seen how successful this scale-up through the government will be, and whether this would change our evaluation of Friendship Bench.**

Part of the Friendship Bench funding gap is \$200,000 for their 'Innovation budget'. Notably, Friendship Bench is putting in place improvements to its M&E systems. This will involve a transition from virtual follow-ups to face-to-face follow-ups to improve response rates. Moreover, this will include a focus on capturing the predictors of whether someone does 1 or more sessions. This means that Friendship Bench is keen to investigate the phenomenon we highlighted in our report as a key uncertainty: Recipients receive on average only 1.12 sessions out of 6 possible sessions ([see Section 5.2.3 of our report](#)). They estimate that they can investigate the low number of sessions with \$25,000 of their innovation budget.

Friendship Bench's costs have not changed much from a cost to treat of \$16.50 in 2023 (which we used in our analysis) to \$16.21 [in 2024](#).



[Donate to Friendship Bench](#) today enabling them to treat more people for depression.

## StrongMinds

[StrongMinds](#) has set a general fundraising goal of \$10 million for 2025 and launched a separate \$1 million campaign to support an upcoming RCT, for an \$11 million total goal. As of now, they have raised approximately \$6.7 million in committed funds, leaving a remaining gap of \$3.3 million (\$4.3 million if counting the RCT).

For 2026, their preliminary fundraising target for 2026 is \$12.5 million. To date, they have raised \$1 million in pledged funds. Including current prospective donors weighted by likelihood, their projection is that they will raise ~\$5.6 million, leaving a gap of ~\$6.9 million.

In total, that's a projected funding gap of \$11.2 million.

StrongMinds had a \$1 million grant over 3 years from USAID that was intended to support mental health treatment for adolescents participating in an existing USAID-funded program. This started in the middle of 2024 but is now frozen. StrongMinds has lost almost \$947,498 (approximately 95%) of this funding. As a result, an estimated 50,000 adolescents who would have received group talk therapy (IPT-G) will no longer be reached. Additionally, USAID cuts have affected StrongMinds's partnerships with three NGOs, for which they now need to absorb the cost of reaching clients through them.

An important change for StrongMinds is that they no longer have StrongMinds staff directly delivering psychotherapy (this represented [5% of treated clients in 2023](#)). They have transitioned towards fully treating people through partners: peer facilitators (individuals who have received the StrongMinds programme before, and count as government volunteers in Uganda, but StrongMinds funds some stipends), government-affiliated community health workers and teachers (where StrongMinds also funds some stipends), and partner NGOs who work in other countries like Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Malawi.

StrongMinds now see themselves increasingly as a general technical adviser and facilitator to African governments and other NGOs. They mentioned having implemented processes to ensure high quality of training and delivery across all types of delivery. They are also rolling out district level implementation strategies with the government in Uganda (which has led to a cost per person reduction). StrongMinds have also facilitated advocacy work – for which they have hired a Head of Advocacy. For example, they successfully partnered with teenagers to lobby the Ministry of Health in Uganda to change policy such that schools must dedicate one hour per week to mental health. StrongMinds is going to help support the schools in delivering this. The effect of this change is yet to be evaluated.

**It remains to be seen how successful this scale-up through the government will be.** This might also mean we need to update our model for StrongMinds in light of these changes. Notably, this heightens questions about how much of the impact StrongMinds claims through partners is attributable to StrongMinds. If StrongMinds trains someone else to treat clients, should we attribute all these clients to StrongMinds? Currently, we adjust for this by applying a small increase in costs (see [Appendix N of our report](#) for more detail).



We will also have to consider the harder-to-model aspects like advocacy. For now, we think that our cost-effectiveness figures for StrongMinds are still appropriate but we plan to review these changes (and update our model if necessary) when we have time.

One important change is that StrongMinds's cost to treat depression has been declining. In 2023, it cost \$41 per person (which is the figure we used in our report). [In 2024](#), StrongMinds treated 426,642 persons for expenses of \$9,818,833, resulting in a cost per person of \$23. They estimate that they will reach a cost of \$20 per person in 2025, which would increase StrongMinds's cost-effectiveness to 90 WELLBY created per \$1,000 donated (or \$11 to create a WELLBY). **Note, however, that this is just a quick prediction – which hasn't accounted for changes in StrongMinds approaches – we do not advise funders take this estimate at face value.**

StrongMinds also see themselves as innovators regarding mental health work in low-income countries. In the past, they did research showing that reducing the number of sessions could be cost-effective because it didn't significantly reduce impact (still to be published). They have also recently started investigating the effectiveness of single sessions psychotherapy within their model (with Dr Schleider). Moreover, they are now actively fundraising for an RCT of their programme conducted in partnership with ID insight. We are very excited about this news as the lack of a *relevant* RCT is a core uncertainty we mentioned [in our report](#).

**[Donate to StrongMinds today](#) and help regain the funding lost by USAID and help more people in need.**

## Pure Earth

[Pure Earth](#)'s funding gap for their cosmetics project in Ghana is now ~\$1,555,000. Note that Pure Earth runs several programmes and we just focused on this one, as they said it was their most cost-effective *unfunded* programme. This is down from \$1.6 million because of a recent matching campaign that collected \$45,000. This seems to have been helped in part by [the mention of our work in Vox](#).

Pure Earth's cosmetics project in Ghana is underway. They have made strides in collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency and the government in Ghana. They have signed an MOU with the Ghana Standards Authority to begin the process of adopting standards for eyeliner cosmetics in the country. A consultant has been hired to conduct a regulatory analysis of cosmetics in Ghana. Pure Earth has started in-depth research to identify the key stakeholders within the eyeliner sector (suppliers, distributors, regulators, consumers, etc.). All of that has been accomplished despite some delays caused by the recent change in government in Ghana.

Pure Earth also keeps pushing forward the state of research about lead exposure in the world. They have [published their cumulative blood lead levels metric](#) (which involves multiplying the blood lead level by the population size). A [recent study](#) of the role of the actions of the Georgian government, with the help of Pure Earth, has come out. In 2023, in Poti, Georgia, measures of blood lead levels (BLLs) were taken for 63 2-7-year-olds, and lead content was analysed in spices and other products. Results were compared to a previous study in 2018. There



was a decline in BLLs from 7.5 to 2.05, and a decline in lead concentrations in spices from 4.2 mg/kg to 0.25 mg/kg. This adds to our belief that Pure Earth's actions can lead to important change.

In July 2025 we corrected an error in how we calculated the increase in the cost of the programme based on Pure Earth's overhead. This increased the programme cost from \$2,093,235 to \$2,150,302, slightly reducing the cost-effectiveness from 108 to 105 WBp1k. [We have updated our \*Toxic Cosmetic\* report.](#) Our World Happiness Report chapter was before this edit, but our Living Review does take it into account.

**[Donate to Pure Earth today](#) and enable them to continue making strides protecting children from poisonous lead in Ghana.**

## Taimaka

[Taimaka](#)'s funding gap is \$400,000 for 2026 and \$1.45 million for 2027. While not directly affected by USAID cuts, they remark that the funding for malnutrition has shrunk. It is likely that the [mention of our work in Vox](#) has also helped their fundraising.

Taimaka is planning on scaling up. They aim to treat 75,000 children over the next 2 years, in Gombe. To do so they are expanding to new areas within Gombe.

Their model remains the same, but they are piloting a conditional cash transfer for under 6-months-old care. Taimaka is also conducting an RCT of caregiver mental health (n=2,630) where caregivers with symptoms of depression are enrolled into PM+ (a form of psychotherapy recommended by the WHO). They are also doing a relapse study (n=1,820), tracking post-discharge nutritional outcomes. Results for all these studies are yet to come.

**[Donate to Taimaka today](#) and help them scale up the number of children they can treat for malnutrition.**

## NEPI

**Important Update:** Since September 11th 2025, the [Happier Lives Institute is no longer recommending NEPI](#), the NY non-profit organization that works in Liberia, as the organization has discontinued operations and is in the process of dissolving, due to the discovery of financial irregularities. **This does NOT change our prediction about ACTRA.**

[NEPI](#)'s funding has been severely affected by the USAID cuts. They still have a gap of \$613,000 for their work in Liberia as well as a \$950,000 gap for deploying their work in Nigeria. This latter gap was created due to the USAID Stop Work Order that terminated the \$950,000 grant that deployed their work in Nigeria.

There are some complexities in how money from different funders is granted and unlocked. Instead of being stuck waiting for more funding to unlock in order to run the full 1000-person cohort for this year, NEPI has decided to start with a smaller 360-person cohort to get the ball rolling in Liberia.





## Looking ahead

### Future updates

We will keep updating information about charity recommendations as we conduct more evaluations and as new information from our charities come in. Any major updates to our current recommendations, if there are any, would likely happen towards the end of the year, unless there is a need to update earlier. We aim to keep funding gap information up to date regularly ([you can see funding gaps in the research summaries of the charities](#)).

### More charity evaluations

We are not resting on our current list of recommendations, but will continue to evaluate charities to find cost-effective ways of improving global wellbeing.

## How you can help

You can make a difference TODAY simply by giving what you can spare, joining our community and/or sharing our insights. Help make the world a happier place by:

- **Donating to our recommended charities:** You can [donate to our recommended charities through our website](#) - make a difference today - real impact - real lives
- **Donating to the Happier Lives Institute:** Our research costs time and money! [Support the Happier Lives Institute](#) to keep shining the spotlight on fantastic charities.
- **Staying informed:** [Sign up for our newsletter](#) to receive updates and insights into effective giving opportunities.
- **Advocate:** Share these findings. Wellbeing matters and we can have a large impact by donating wisely!

**Your decision today could change thousands of lives for the better.**