For our International Office, 2018 was a year for focusing on sustainability and quality, with our small Netherlands based team continuing to work closely with colleagues in Eastern and Southern Africa, as well as our partners and donors. The main focus of our energies and efforts has been aimed towards the achievement of the key outcomes and deliverables outlined in our 2017-2020 Strategic Outlook, including the five key objectives highlighted in our 2018 targets.

We’ve continued to provide our regions with strategic, technical and communications support, as they managed our network of Blue Box clinics out in the field. This has included working with colleagues in Eastern Africa to assist with the opening of our new clinic in Namanve, close to Kampala, as well as the refurbishment of our Mlolongo clinic on the outskirts of Nairobi, which has now become the busiest across our entire network. We’ve also been working with our Southern African colleagues to support their collaboration with the Southern African Development Community (SADC), through which North Star has helped strengthen health systems in 11 countries, by transitioning 27 clinics to the Ministries of Health within their respective member states. In addition, we’ve further expanded our service package throughout our network, by increasing the number of clinics offering ART, PrEP and PEP services, as well as introducing a pilot initiative in collaboration with our partners, in which we’ve provided eye tests and offered the opportunity for clients to purchase glasses. Plans are now underway for these services to be scaled up as a result.
Our participation in the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) secondment programme continued into 2018, with us welcoming two new secondees who worked on stock management in our Southern and Eastern Africa regions for a period of six months. Their ideas and proposals were subsequently formulated into a harmonised approach, which has since been rolled out to 5 clinics and will be introduced across the rest of our network in 2019.

Following a rigorous procurement process, we identified and selected a software package and developer that best fits the specifications for our new cross-border electronic medical record (EMR) system. The next phase of the project is now underway to finalise the implementation plan and commence with the development, training and piloting. We’re also continuing our efforts in the meantime, to raise further funds to take forward the next steps for the future roll-out throughout our entire network of clinics.

Our networking, account management, fundraising and brand awareness efforts were stepped up throughout the year. This included participating at the 2018 International AIDS Conference in Amsterdam, where visitors were invited into our replica mini blue box clinic, to meet with both staff, as well as some of our clients, who we’d flown in specially to share their experiences. Visitors were also offered the chance to be transported to Africa whilst taking a 360° virtual reality video tour of one of our roadside clinics. To maximise our presence at AIDS2018, our North Star team were represented and spoke at several satellite sessions, attended partner events, invited visitors to our film screening, hosted our own networking event, featured in the AIDS2018 magazine and met directly with many strategic potential and current partners.

In addition to AIDS2018, North Star were also represented on a panel discussion at the Fifth Global Health Systems Research Symposium in Liverpool and also participated at the invitation only Innovations in Healthcare Annual Forum in Washington, at which our Strategic Advisor was a panel member during one of the sessions.

In May we brought together our senior management team for a week-long workshop, during which the main topic of discussion was the strengthening of trust and transparency across the organisation, as well as ensuring the flow of information was being openly shared between the regions. The main outcome from the meetings and discussions was the introduction of a matrix management model, which is currently being designed and due to be fully implemented in 2020.

The International Office’s main achievements have come about largely as a direct result of the support we’ve received from our financial partners: the Johnson & Johnson Corporate Citizenship Trust, Trafigura Foundation, Puma Energy Foundation, ViiV Healthcare, Pfizer Foundation and Stichting Dioraphte. We’re extremely pleased with the progress of our strategic objectives and are looking forward to realising our plans throughout 2019, as we continue to shape and professionalise our organisation and expand the opportunities for North Star to reach its full potential. We’d like to express our enormous thanks and gratitude to all of the partners that provided North Star with continued and invaluable support throughout 2018. Based on our current forecasts, we expect new funding opportunities to be confirmed, which will open the door for North Star Alliance to make even more headway.

In the interest of strengthening our sustainability, the International Office has worked in collaboration with Sumerian Partners, to extensively review several options to generate revenue in 3 countries; Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa. Our current model is almost entirely dependent on grant funding and having consulted with several experts, the decision was taken to explore opportunities to diversify North Star’s income.