**PRESS RELEASE**

For immediate release: 9th May 2021

**BLCF Celebrates 20th Anniversary as a Local Grantmaker.**

Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation (BLCF) are proud to celebrate 20 years of supporting the community since being set up as a Charity on 9th May 2001.The Foundation was originally formed by Geoffrey Farr MBE DL during his term of office as High Sheriff, Sir Samuel Whitbread KCVO during his tenure as Lord Lieutenant and John Richardson, Bishop of Bedford. The key charitable objectives agreed at the inception were “the promotion of any charitable purposes for the development of the community in the geographic County of Bedfordshire and in particular the advance of education, sport and recreation, social and racial harmony, the protection of good health both mental and physical and the relief of poverty, sickness and social deprivation.” These aims all remain consistent with our approach and core values as they stand today.

As one of the Founders of BLCF we wanted to hear from Geoffrey Farr MBE DL, about his recollections on how the idea first presented itself to him. He told us:

*“During my year as High Sheriff back in 1998/1999, I came to realise that there were many hundreds of charities, the bulk of whom were small and often not registered needing support. In collaboration with the local Mayors and the then Chair of the County Council, we organised an event and over 400 charities accepted the invitation - it was one of the most humbling and emotional days of my life! From there the Community Foundation idea was born, and I started to research other foundations and together with the Bishop of Bedford and the Lord Lieutenant, Sir Sam Whitbread the first meeting was held and here we are twenty years later. The formation of BLCF was without doubt one of the highlights of my life to date."*

As the CEO of the foundation, Karen Perkins spoke of the incredible growth experienced from the 2001 launch saying:

*“Since the first funds were secured from an endowment given by our loyal partners at Whitbread PLC. the foundation has developed and grown it’s offering significantly. Over the last twenty years we have distributed more than £15m, an incredible £8.2m in the last 12 months alone\*. Whilst much of the recent support must be credited to our longstanding relationship with London Luton Airport Ltd., we were also awarded a considerable sum from the recent National Emergencies Trust (NET) via our UK Communities Foundation Network, to support organisations delivering vital services due to Covid-19. For us, the most rewarding part is the approval of essential grants to small, grassroots organisations who then go on to help thousands of worthy beneficiaries both address and overcome some very difficult circumstances.”*

As BLCF look to reflect over the last 20 years, their Chair of Trustees, Viviane Vayssieres, commented that:

 “*We began with very humble awards of around £250 but since then understanding in the sector has changed and we now better appreciate the importance of larger grants over a sustained period to help projects both get off the ground; but to also provide assurance that longer term campaigns and better social outcomes take time and commitment. From giving just 9 grants in 2003, 2020\* saw us award an unprecedented number of more than 300, to over 200 local organisations with the ability to reach 530,000 beneficiaries. These figures are simply outstanding and something we believe should make our founders rightly proud.”*

With 20 years of support behind them and numerous different funding streams managed during that time, BLCF have supported a multitude of organisations and services covering everything from: after-school clubs, mental health counselling sessions, funding for refuges to help women escaping domestic violence, foodbanks, digital poverty, paying winter fuel bills, to working with carers and youth groups to combat isolation and loneliness across all ages.

Whilst their history deserves celebrating, there is still much work to do and as an organisation they relish the opportunity to increase their impact, influence and offering to those who need it the most.

To find out more about their work and how to get involved either as a donor or as a charity applying for funding, please visit their website: [www.blcf.org.uk](https://www.blcf.org.uk/)

You can also follow their celebrations on social media, **@bedlutcf** using the hashtag **#BLCFCelebrate**

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**Editor Notes:**

*\*Data reported covers 31st March 2020-1st April 2021*

For more information or to request an interview with a spokesperson, please contact

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**About the Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation**
BLCF is a grantmaker supporting local community groups and charities <https://www.blcf.org.uk/> It focuses on providing accessible funding based on a deep understanding of community needs. The organisation’s aim is to be a catalyst for social change for the community of Bedfordshire and Luton through collecting funds from local businesses and individuals to give to the local charities most in need.