

Annual Report 2024–25



Bedfordshire & Luton
Community Foundation



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“BLCF has been really supportive with lots of hands on help.”

St Luke's Legrave

About Us

Our Vision

A Bedfordshire that is thriving, collaborative and inclusive where there is opportunity for all and the lives of the most disadvantaged have been transformed through innovative, community-based solutions.

Our Principles

- Ready to challenge
- Deliver lasting change
- Embrace opportunities
- Always accountable
- Locally focused
- Ever curious
- Highly skilled
- Reflect and represent

Our Role

We are a grantmaker, philanthropic adviser, and a community leader. We act as the bridge between where the resources are and where it's needed.

Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation (BLCF) is the leading local grantmaker in the county. We are passionate about improving the lives of people in Bedfordshire and Luton and we are known for our ground-breaking initiatives, for our investment in supporting local charities, and for our deep relationships with grassroots groups in our area.

Our Priorities

- To eradicate poverty in our county
- To create a healthy Bedfordshire
- To grow stronger communities

Our Golden Threads

- Addressing inequality across all characteristics
- Listening and learning from our community partners
- Contributing to addressing the climate crisis

Our Strategy

- Widen our reach
- Listen, learn, adapt, and change
- Offer excellence
- Sustain, grow, and thrive

A word from our chair

This has been my second full year as BLCF Chair and has been a continued period of growth and development. During the year we completed our skills audit for Trustees and worked to recruit several new faces to the Board, reflecting a range of skills from HR and governance to financial management and business development and expertise of community need and charitable sector working. The BLCF Board continues to explore, develop and secure our future and the new, reinforced, Board will bring fresh skills and deliver support, guidance and challenge to our CEO and grant panels.

The Foundation is looking forward to its 25th anniversary year in 2026. Work is now underway to develop a new funding programme to mark this milestone, which will be bookended with events, one for the voluntary sector and the other for BLCF's stakeholders, where we will celebrate our journey of significant growth, and promote our future strategic focus.

In conclusion, I would like to extend my thanks to current trustees, who, in supporting our Chief Executive, Karen Perkins, have been instrumental in ensuring that BLCF continues to operate so effectively, thrive and develop. Thank you too to BLCF's exceptional staff team and to our volunteers, whose commitment and enthusiasm has been so important in the delivery of another successful year.



Sue Hughes
Chair of Trustees

A word from our CEO

2024 -25 has been a dynamic year for BLCF, as we continue to grow and expand and diversify our partnerships and support for communities and the the voluntary, charity, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector. The demand for support continues to rise as the post-COVID impact on volunteer recruitment, cost of living and energy rises, and the pressure of National Insurance cost increases has rocked the charity sector, adding further pressure to those who are most vitally needed to support those vulnerable in our society.

The year has seen the Foundation complete the third year of our Strategic Plan with 99% of our priority actions for 2024-25 underway or completed and now the Senior Leadership Team begin the process of reviewing this plan with the input of our stakeholders, donors and the VCFSE sector.

A key achievement in the last year includes the significant investment in capacity of the BLCF Team from Trustees by recruiting new staff members to our team. We secured new partnerships and have invested in learning and development as part of our commitment to ensuring a sustainable and robust VCFSE sector. We publicised a new EDI Framework and data for our programmes and staff and trustees to ensure we demonstrate our commitment to representing our communities and to breaking down barriers to accessing our funding.

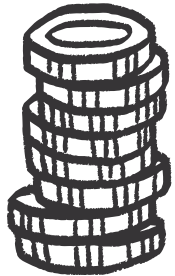
I continue to be grateful to my amazing team for their professionalism, commitment and diligence in all their work



Karen Perkins
CEO

Understanding our county

In 2025, we refreshed our Vital Signs Research. This involved collating data from a survey sent to members of the local community and examining secondary data. From our research, we learnt that...



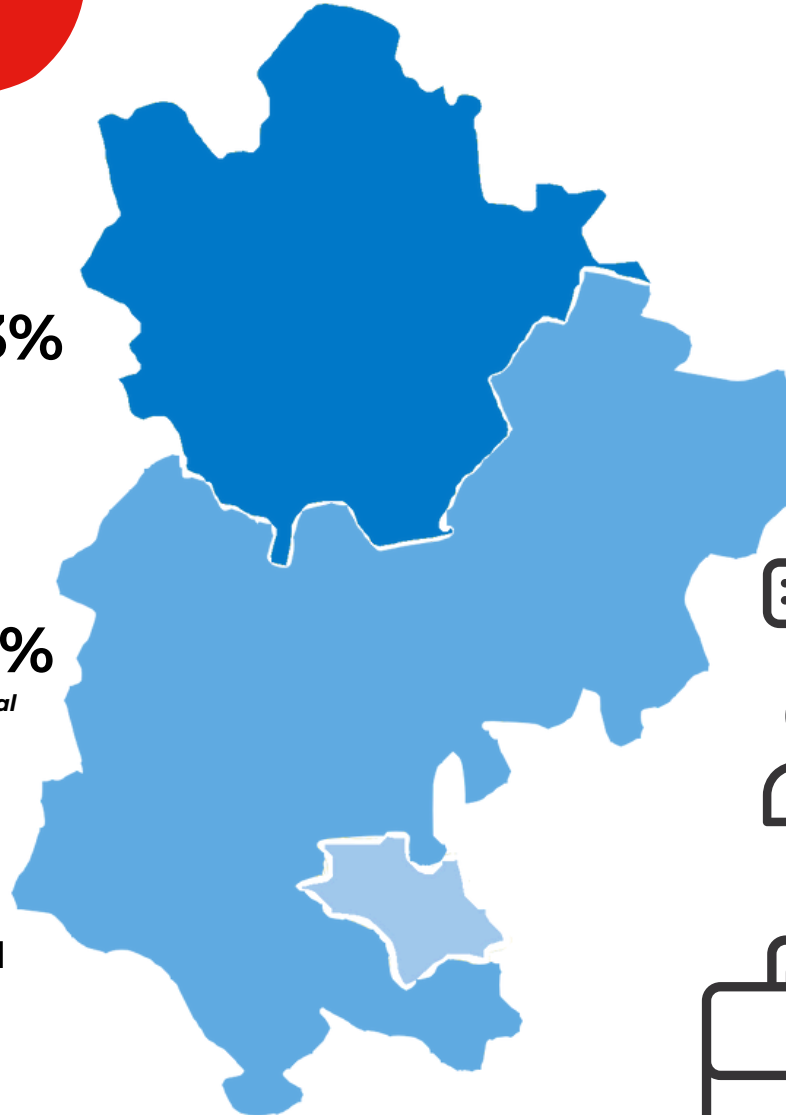
Luton is more deprived than **89%** of local authorities districts in England, while Bedford is more deprived than **53%**
2025 Index of Multiple Deprivation



The rate of statutory homelessness in the county has increased by **6%**
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2024



53% of respondents said they had increased their climate-aware activities



77% of respondents said mental health had worsened in the area



32% of respondents said that “things overall in their community are worse”



The number of people in part-time or insecure employment has risen by **5%**
Office of National Statistics, 2024c

Case study FACES (Bedford)

Family And Children Early Help Services (FACES) Bedford offers a wide range of support to families in Bedford Borough. Through recruiting and training volunteers, FACES helps to identify issues families are facing and provide advice, support, and signposting where needed.

Michaela Martindale, CEO of FACES, has seen that people are “crying out for advice.” To address this need, FACES has established a Warm Space for families to access one-to-one advice, support, and signposting, addressing health, isolation, and energy efficiency.

Recently, FACES was able to support *Susan, a mother of five boys, aged between four and 13 years old, through the Warm Space drop-in sessions. Susan was seeking support to understand and resolve her present housing situation, as well as needing advice regarding parenting a child with additional needs.

Together, Susan and the team at FACES were able to complete an income and expenditure assessment to map out where money could be saved, income increased, and costs reduced. Guidance and information leaflets were handed over in relation to household energy saving and assistance was provided to sign up to the priority services register. FACES was also able to gather information regarding Susan’s housing application and escalated the housing issues to the local council’s housing advice team.

Speaking on the help that FACES was able to provide, *Susan said: “Thank you, FACES, for your support and advice with my housing application. I did not feel heard by other professionals who are

supposed to help, but FACES has gone over and above for us. I now feel more positive about our rehousing prospects and no longer fear asking for help.”

Through the funding from Cadent, FACES has been able to increase staff capacity, provide relevant resources, and organise these Warm Spaces to meet the need of the community. FACES has already started planning several slow cooking sessions in the upcoming few months and look forward to helping their community make budget conscious healthy meals.

FACES is a recipient of the the Cadent Centres for Warmth Programme.



*Names have been changed in this case study.



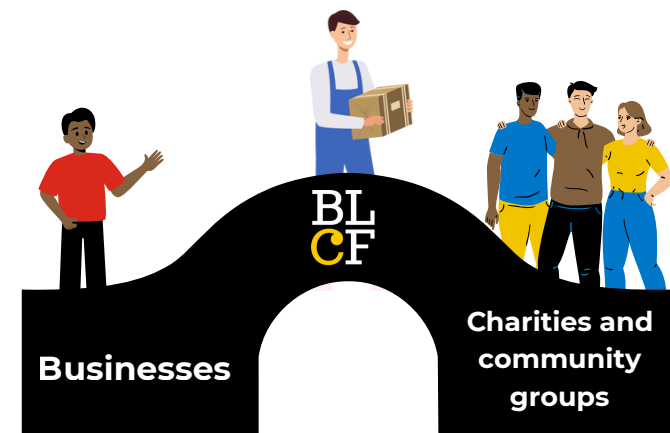
“The funding has created meaningful and lasting change in the community.”

Bellator Boxing Academy

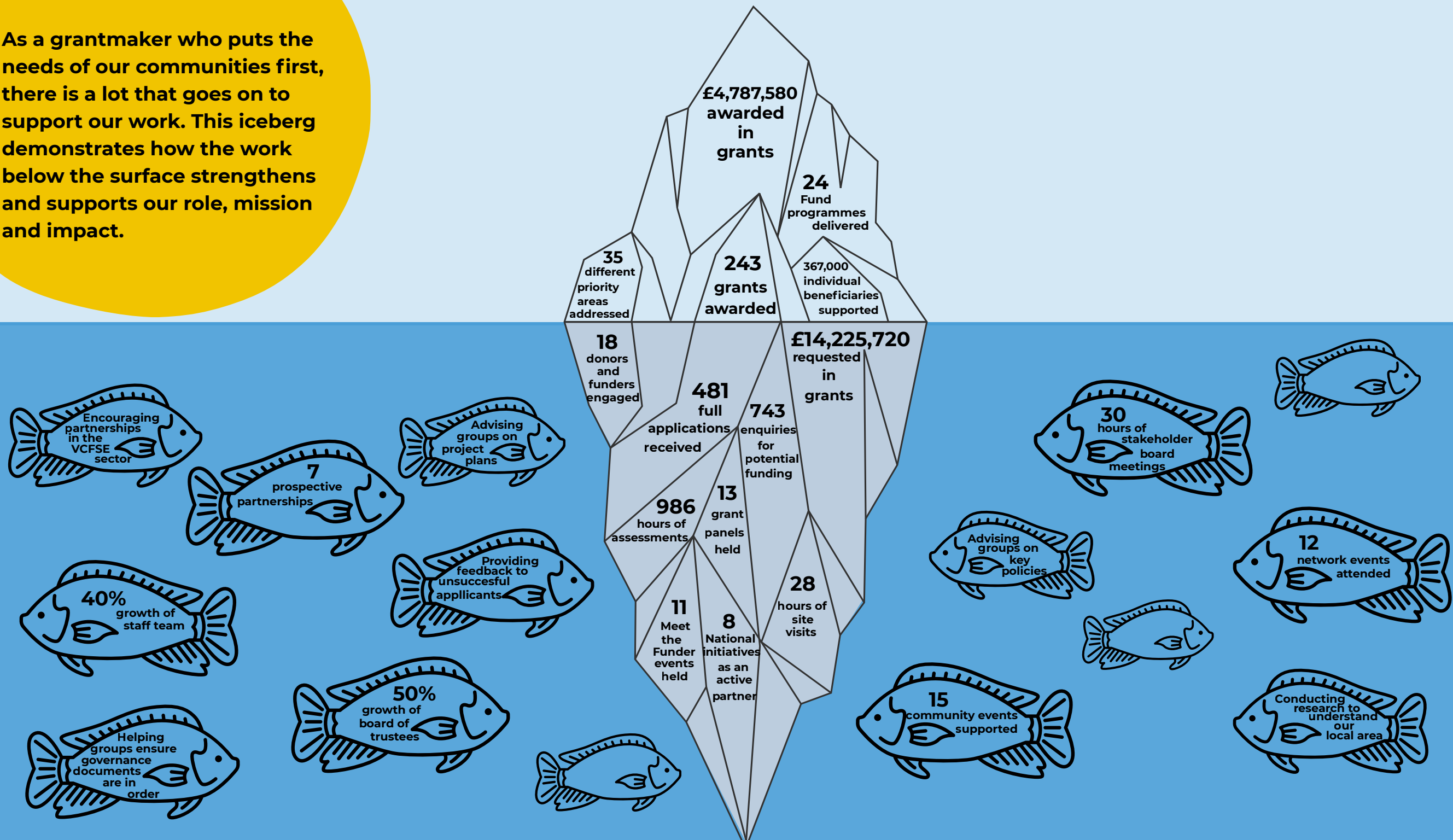
How we help

As the leading local grantmaker in Bedfordshire and Luton, we are passionate about improving the lives of people in the county and tackling the issues outlined above. Through investing support in local charities and forging deep relationships with grassroots groups in our area, we ensure the main priority areas in our county are addressed.

To do this, we bridge the gap between where the money is and where it's needed. We work with businesses and partners to link resources to those who need help. BLCF strives to connect charities, build partnerships, and support people in need.



As a grantmaker who puts the needs of our communities first, there is a lot that goes on to support our work. This iceberg demonstrates how the work below the surface strengthens and supports our role, mission and impact.



Case study Strathmore Methodist's Community Breakfast Club (Luton)

Since 2018, Strathmore Methodist's Community Breakfast Club has been providing locals in need with the opportunity to connect with each other over a warming breakfast. The Community Breakfast Club has seen a significant increase in attendees over the years, with an average of approximately 40 per session.

Speaking on the rise in popularity of the club, and its growing need, its founder, Deborah Abodunrin-Olokode, says "I think the need [of our club] addresses... poverty. And poverty can show up in different ways: people can be time poor, people can be people poor... A lot of services are closed [over the weekend] so what happens to people on Saturday or Sunday?"

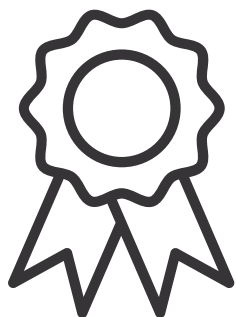
After working with BLCF and being successful in funding applications, Deborah says that "the grant has given us peace of mind... to know that we can keep going," likening the working relationship to BLCF as "when you're a child and your parent looks after you... [BLCF] looks after you, supports you, and then [encourages you] to go out in the world."

From the advice received from BLCF, Strathmore Methodist's Community Breakfast Club is now feeling ready to seek more opportunities for funding to secure long-term projects, such as the Family Breakfast Club, Summer Party and Winter Party.

Strathmore Methodist's Community Breakfast Club is a recipient of the Luton Citizen's Fund, funded by Luton Borough Council and managed by BLCF.

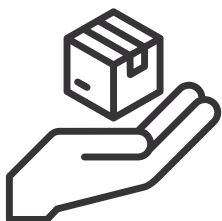


2024-25 at a glance



£4,787,580

Awarded in grants



481

Applications received



243

Grants awarded



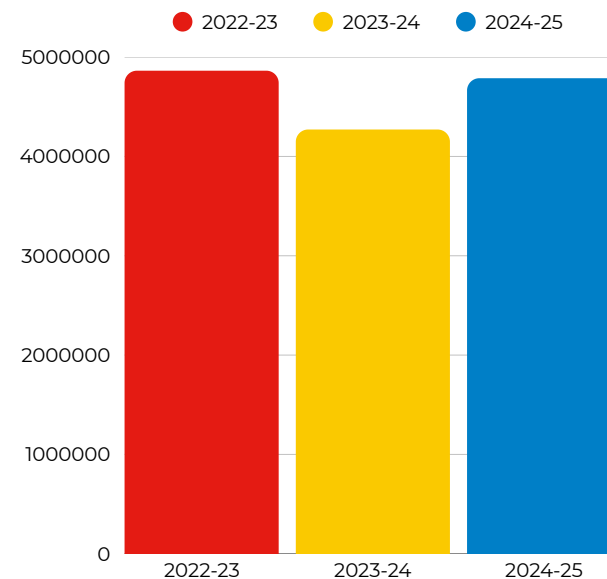
£14,225,720

Requested in grants

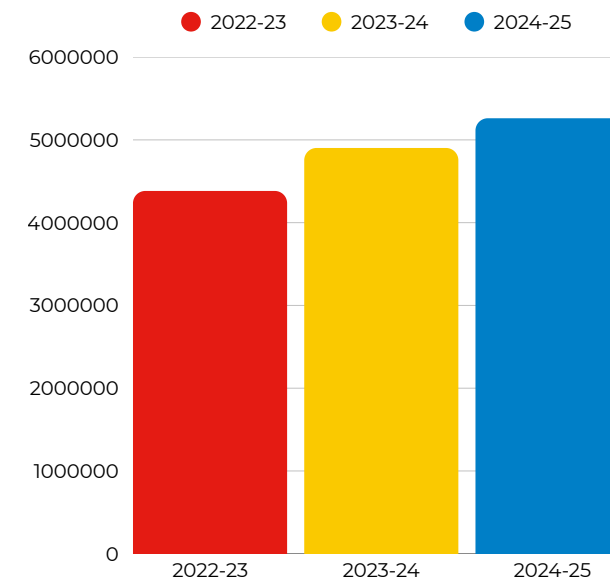


743

Enquiries for potential funding



Grants awarded compared to previous years



Our income compared to previous years

“Without this funding, [our project] simply wouldn't exist.”

St Augustine's Primary School

2024-25 at a glance

Luton Citizens' Fund Decision Day

On 18th January 2025, BLCF attended the Luton Citizens' Fund Decision Day in partnership with Luton Borough Council. Spanning across four locations, the day saw a great turnout from the local community who were able to engage with various initiatives to find out about their work and impact.



Meet the Funder

Over the course of the year, BLCF has hosted numerous Meet the Funder events, where groups can ask questions around a fund's criteria and their eligibility.



Community Investment Fund Learning Event

BLCF hosted the Community Investment Fund Learning Event on Monday 20th Jan. This event brought together approximately 30 organisations to offer thoughts and reflections on their delivered projects, and offered the opportunity to peer learn, network, and connect.



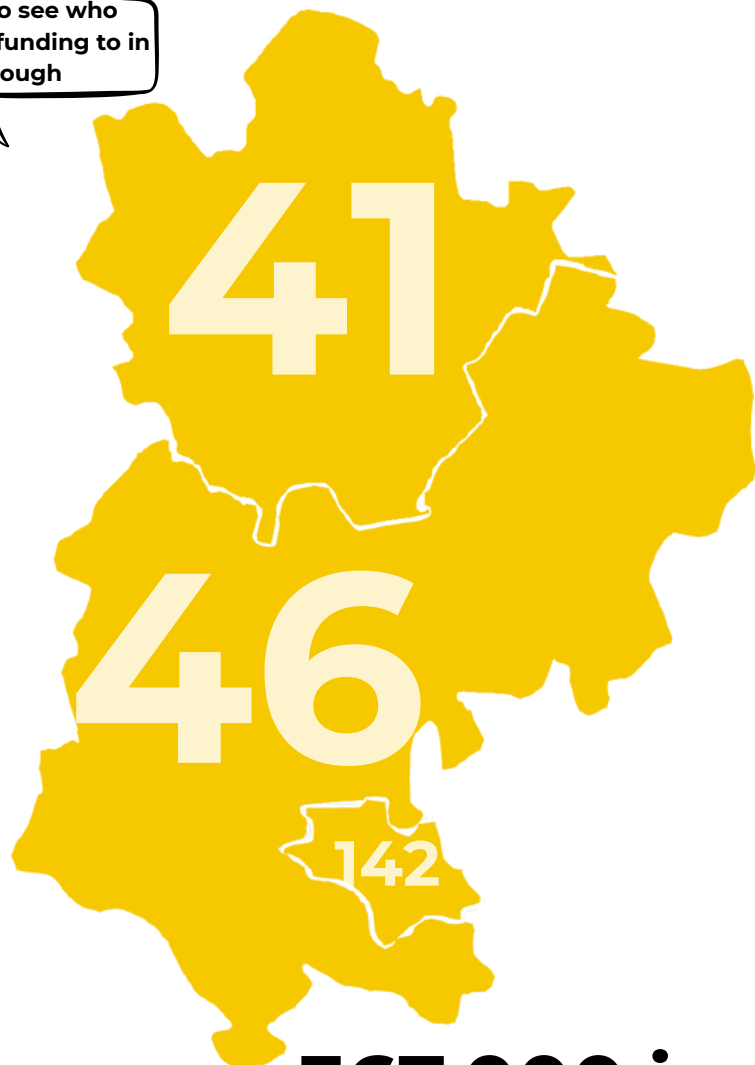
Luton Fairness Taskforce

As a key partner of the Luton Fairness Taskforce, we support and help facilitate events throughout the year. Each year, the taskforce aims to hold at least four events to engage with the community.

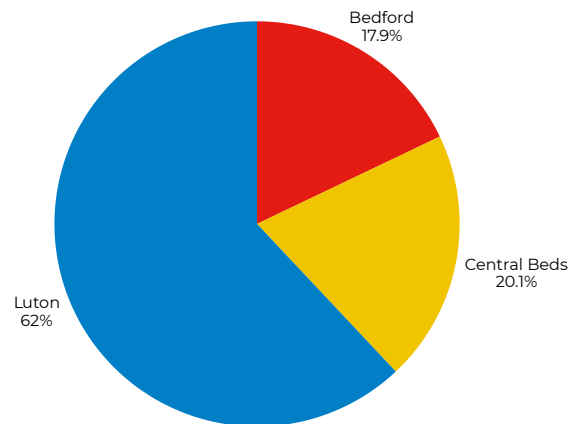


Where and who we've funded

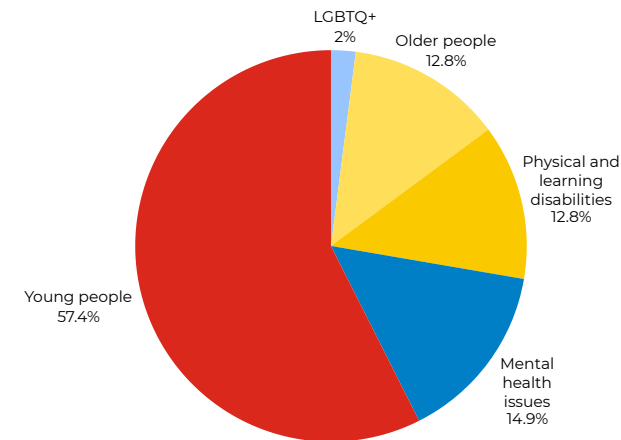
Click on me to see who we've awarded funding to in each borough



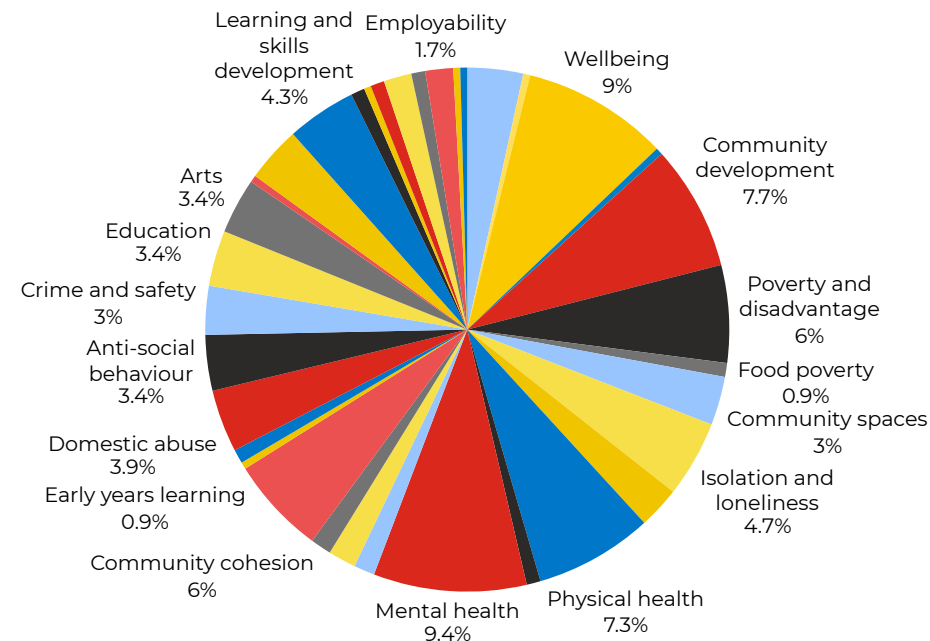
367,000 individual beneficiaries supported



Number of grants awarded per borough



Grants awarded for projects supporting diverse communities



Themes and priorities addressed across our grants

Case study

For Men to Talk (Central Bedfordshire)

Since December 2019, For Men to Talk has provided space for men to connect and talk about their mental health issues. Originally based in Biggleswade, the group has now expanded to ten different locations across Central Bedfordshire with four types of groups and sessions running concurrently (in-person, virtual, walking, and even fishing!).

These groups aim to address the growing epidemic of men's mental health. Luke Newman, CEO/Founder of For Men to Talk, highlights that "men often do not talk about their feelings... and sometimes they do not know why they're feeling how they're feeling. These groups provide the space for men to meet others and open this dialogue."

As a testament to the vital support these groups offer, Luke tells the story of one service user who, before the COVID-19 lockdowns, was close to taking his own life. The service user was drawn to check his wallet and saw a picture of his partner, which halted his attempt to take his own life and meant he called 999. From taking the step to reach out for help, his mental health was evaluated by the hospital and steps were taken to provide support. When lockdown happened, however, this gentleman found that the support systems that were offered to him were gone. It was here that he found the For Men to Talk virtual sessions and has been attending the sessions ever since. The service user is now thriving, becoming a part of the Board of Directors at For Men to Talk and even implementing men's mental health initiatives at his new workplace. "[Examples such as this] show that if you look for some support, it can really improve your mental health," Luke says.

Without the funding, Luke notes that he wouldn't have been able to run the organisation full time and offer the essential support that For Men to Talk offers. Not only this but the funding has provided a chance to build For Men to Talk's network, giving the opportunity for Luke to organise a Men's Mental Health Awareness Day at the airport. For this event, Luke and the local firemen walked 14 miles with 14kg bags in the terminals. As a result of this event, For Men to Talk were able to raise £595 so far for men's mental health.

For Men to Talk is a recipient of the Community Trust Fund funded by London Luton Airport and managed by BLCF.



Our major 2024-25 funders



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



... and many more

“Working with such a talented and focussed organisation with great links and local knowledge has demonstrated the value of targeted, place-based grant making, empowering community groups who have historically faced barriers to funding and supporting projects rooted in local insight.”

*Karen Lawson, Peabody
Healthier, Wealthier, Happier Communities Fund*

Our commitment as a grantmaker

Climate

BLCF is proud to be a member of the Funders Commitment on Climate Change. Through this, we are committed to the following six principles:

1. Educate and learn
2. Commit resources to accelerate work on climate change
3. Integrate climate change impacts
4. Steward our investments for a post-carbon future
5. Decarbonise our operations
6. Report on our progress

Diversity

BLCF is also proud to be an Associate Member of BAOBAB Foundation and a member of The Funders for Racial Equality Alliance (FREAA). These memberships keep us accountable and committed to ensuring we are addressing inequalities within our work.

Breaking down barriers

BLCF is undertaking a process of greater transparency in our funding distribution and the first step of this is the utilisation of the [360giving platform](#). We believe that with better information, grantmakers can be more effective and strategic decision makers. 360Giving provides support for grantmakers to publish their grants data openly, to understand their data, and to use the data to create online tools that make grant making more effective.

Quality Accreditation

In 2024-25, we secured our Quality Accreditation, which defines the core standards that guide the unique work of community foundations, ensuring consistency, accountability and credibility across UKCF network. The robust framework provides assurance to external stakeholders, potential partners, and strategic investors that every member of the network operates to a high standard.

£228,838

Awarded to projects supporting diverse communities

£100,195

Awarded to projects addressing climate issues

£559,249

Awarded to projects focused on equality and stronger communities

What's next for us?

Keep reading to find out how to support us on our journey →

25th Anniversary

2026 will see our 25th Anniversary, and we are looking forward to celebrating our impact across the year while also looking ahead to our next 25 years. From our anniversary dinner to a fundraising Walk Across Bedfordshire, there is a lot to get involved in.

2025 Vital Signs

We have launched our new Vital Signs research, which identifies priority issues on the community to inform our strategy going forward.

New strategic plan

Following the launch of our Vital Signs research, we will create a new Strategic Plan to ensure we continue to be a leading grantmaker in the county.

Partnerships

We are always looking for new partnerships to explore more opportunities to support our communities. Read on to find out how you can work with us.

How to support us

Start a Fund

Make a monthly or one-off payment online to support our mission and secure long-lasting impact in Bedfordshire and Luton.

Leave a legacy

Contact us to see how we can work with your business to reach your CSR goals and support our local community.

There are different ways to start a fund with us, and we are happy to connect to guide you through the process to ensure your money suits your needs and garners the most impact.

Donate online

Leaving a gift in your will as an established fund can ensure your memory lives in and supports the development of our communities.

Business partnerships

“We wouldn’t have been able to do any of this without the funding.”

Denbigh Primary School



How to support us by starting a fund

Flow through fund



Grants

Your donation will be used over an agreed upon time, providing immediate support for our communities.

For more information, please contact
dawn.bainbridge@blcf.org.uk

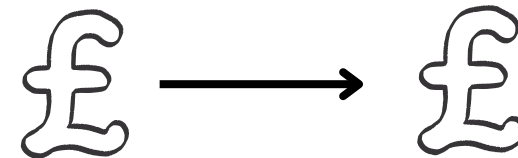


Endowment fund



Endowment funds allow your money to grow over time, meaning that you can support communities year-on-year. Working with us and our fund managers, your invested money will be protected and we will use a portion of this annually to distribute funds to causes and communities close to your heart.

Trust transfer



We will act as stewards of your trust, ensuring your money reaches our communities in the way you have asked.

Case study

The Young People's Puppet Theatre (our near neighbour)

Sharing their passion for puppetry, the family-run arts-education charity The Young People's Puppet Theatre provides children with the opportunity to work on large-scale puppetry projects. These projects are designed for students to design and make marionette puppets, backdrops, and props as well as working on light and sound production with the goal of putting on a full performance run solely by the students.

Working in St Albans, Hertfordshire and Luton, the Young People's Puppet Theatre offers a unique approach by targeting schools with a high percentage of access to free school meal or children with English as a second language. Implementing this during school hours as a bonus to the curriculum gives students who may miss out on extracurricular activities, due to things such as caring responsibilities, the chance to participate and gain valuable skills to assist their development.

Not only do these projects allow children to develop their practical skills, but also aim to improve confidence, teamwork, resilience and communication. Recently, the Young People's Puppet Theatre worked with a student who had been diagnosed with autism and ADHD in the year prior to participating in puppets, leading to some behavioural issues. With the intervention of puppets, this student's confidence improved substantially, so much so that she felt that she could stand up in front of an audience as a storyteller. Caitlin also adds that this student (aged 10) is now "fanatical" about Shakespeare, reading the original plays in her spare time and even being taken to see Shakespeare performances live on stage.

Speaking on the process of applying for a grant with BLCF, Caitlin highlights "I've always found the BLCF grants team seemed really helpful on the end of the phone... The process of applying has been streamlined in recent years, which has been great. [BLCF] has been a great funder to work with."

The Young People's Puppet Theatre is a recipient of the Near Neighbours and Small Grants Fund, funded by Luton Rising and managed by BLCF.



Meet our team



Karen Perkins
CEO



Francesca Johnstone
Head of Impact



Jaqui Childs
Finance Consultant



Dawn Bainbridge
Head of Business
Development



Simon Cook
Senior Grants Manager



Jamie Glanville
Data Officer



Jemma Callue
Marcomms Officer



Lucy Pollock
Office Administrator



Rae Rahman
Grants Manager



Suzanne France
Grants Manager



Rachael Leonard
Grants Manager



Humaira Hassan
Grants Officer



Deborah Hathway
Grants Administrator



Sue Hughes
Chair of Trustees



Chris Collett
Vice Chair
Chair of Finance Committee



Venesa Coodien
Chair of
Governance Committee



James Western
Chair of Fund
Development Committee



Ian Taylor
Trustee



Aimee Gomez
Trustee



Louise Mackenzie
Trustee



Junaid Ahmed
Trustee



Augusta Evans
Trustee



Gareth Thomas
Trustee



Julian Barker
Trustee



Wayne Humberstone
Trustee



“[BLCF] look after you, they support you, and then [they encourage you] to go out in the world.”

*Strathmore Methodist's
Community Breakfast Club*

Stay connected

Follow us on the social media platforms below to see all our latest news and what we get up to in our anniversary year.



Want to learn more about our work, including what grants are currently open? Visit our website to find out more.

www.blcf.org.uk

Any questions? Please don't hesitate to contact us at our email address:

administrator@blcf.org.uk