



Bedfordshire & Luton  
Community Foundation

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# Luton Rising Fund Report- Apr 2022-Mar 2023

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## Introduction

This report covers the grants and activities of the Luton Rising funding programmes during 2022-2023 (1st April to 31st March).

An annual report is prepared to demonstrate the impact of grants awarded, which includes key information around the number of grants awarded, geographical areas and beneficiaries' breakdown.

Should you require any further explanation or more detail please do contact Francesca Johnstone, Head of Impact & Programmes at BLCF via: [francesca.johnstone@blcf.org.uk](mailto:francesca.johnstone@blcf.org.uk)

## Update from the CEO

The past 12 months of 2022-23, have seen us complete our first full year of delivery of our Strategic Plan. ***Local focus Lasting Change***. In the context of a post pandemic world, cost of living and energy crisis and a War in Europe the challenges faced by charities remains significant. Our funding continues to be grassroots and needs led and informed by those working directly with our communities. We have delivered 4 Insight network events on the themes of Mental Health, Artists and Communities, Young People and the Climate Crisis all used to shape our work. Through our work we have awarded **£4.8m** through **492 applications** resulting in **284 successful grant** awards, benefiting **223,000 people**.

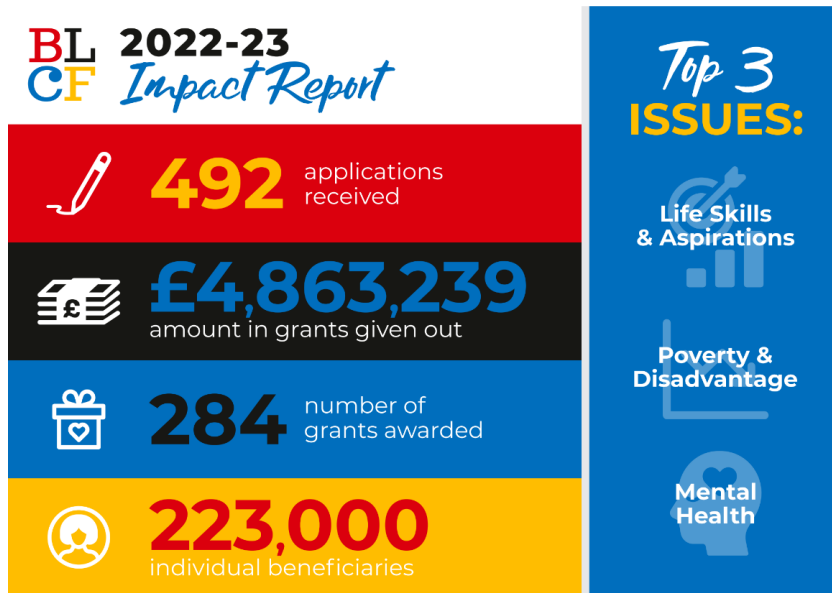
Our team has grown, and our reach widened into new partnership areas across Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough as well as our well-developed partnerships in Luton and we even managed to meet His Majesty the King! We continue to secure and consolidate our donor partnerships and ensure a breadth and depth of our work and always with an eye on our own financial sustainability, as we explore innovative projects around VCSE CPD programmes, Charity Hub model and Social Value opportunities.

This year will see a change in our Trustees and staff as we diversify and ensure we value those with lived experience into our volunteer work and paid roles. We are also awaiting the publication of our latest Annual Report which will set the way ahead for the Foundation to continue its impactful work but are delighted to have published the findings of our Vital Sign 2023.

-Karen Perkins- CEO, BLCF

## General Update from BLCF

It has been another busy year for BLCF with demand for funding and our support continuing to grow. The VCSE sector continues to see significant demand for their services also, with often limited funds and resources available to deliver.



\*The above image is from our impact analysis over the financial year April 2022-March 2023 and figures shown are across all our work in the county

## Luton split-



\*this infographic shows the split of work for the Luton area, across all our work. The amount awarded figure also included the Community Investment Fund programme.

We are seeing the impact of the current job market pressures and cost of living biting for many. Some organisations have had to cut back on office space, staffing, or are struggling to recruit at all. One of the key issues around recruitment, which has always historically been an issue, are the level of salaries and the fact that the VCSE sector simply cannot compete with the private sector with regards to this. We will continue to work with our donors and partners to consider this as a key issue and to factor this in when helping to fund core costs or staff costs for groups. Without proper resourcing support around core costs and staffing, services will not be delivered, impacting those who need it the most in the community.

## Insight

Another way the Foundation is trying to add value in the sector is further developing our Insight initiative. We are looking to grow the upskilling element of this programme, following discussions with our colleagues at the Community Voluntary Service and University of Bedfordshire, with the view to offer a programme of bespoke training. Alongside this, to enable smaller not-for-profit groups to access this, we would like to offer bursaries to enable their staff/volunteers to participate and upskill their workforce. These groups often do not have the financial stability or flexibility to attend training.

Investing in this way will ensure groups are adding value to their workforce and will enable them access CPD opportunities. We will be working with interested partners and donors to help seed fund this element and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with partners supporting the Stability Fund programme.



Established in 2015, The Funders for Race Equality Alliance (FREA) are a group of funders working together to achieve race equality in the UK through philanthropy. BLCF are one of 15 organisations who have used the toolkit developed by FREA to address inequality within the funding sector to global majority communities and those experiencing racial injustice. In the FREA 21-22 audit, funders were asked to report on the leadership of the

groups awarded funding to see where there is representative senior leadership and lived experience of issues facing the community. When we look at the percentage of grants awarded to groups where 75% of their Board and 50% of their senior staff are from groups experiencing racial inequality, the national average is 28% and at BLCF this increases to 33%. The percentage of grants awarded to groups led by people who have experienced racial inequality shows a national average of 24% and at BLCF 33%. Most exciting is the data we see which reports on percentage of grants awarded to groups led by people who have lived experience of the communities they support. Here the national average is 1% and BLCF 32%. We are now examining and reporting our data for 2022-23 and will be sharing that's with partners in the coming months. The Foundation continues to be a champion for addressing inequality through its work and has over the last 12month tested new model to fast track applications and deliver micros grants all with an aim of breaking down barriers to accessing funding and supporting groups from global majority communities gain skills and confidence in applying for funding.



BLCF work with the Institute of Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) in the Open and Trusting grant-making network, which is committed to maintaining excellence in funding charities by committing to eight areas of accountability; don't waste time, ask relevant questions, accept risk, act with

urgency, be open, enable flexibility, communicate with purpose and be proportionate. In our recent

peer review conducted by organisations Open Harmony CIC and Friends of Hannah, we scored highly on demonstrating that we put charities at the heart of our funding practice, on being responsive to need in our communities and being approachable and adaptable to need.



### Vital Signs 2023

The Vital Signs research model provides holistic, locally informed data on fluid social issues which affect those living and working within the area. For BLCF, it brought forward three key priorities, which clearly stood out for those they exist to support and highlighted how all three priority issues for Bedfordshire are understood to be intrinsically connected. **Equality & Strong Communities, Employment & Local Economy, and Mental Health**, have all been recognised as directly linked to one another. To read the report in full see [Vital Signs |](#)

[Bedfordshire & Luton Community Foundation \(blcf.org.uk\)](https://www.blc.org.uk)

## Grants awarded through Luton Rising Funding Programmes

Over the last year we have received **82** direct applications across Small Grants, Near Neighbours and Luton Youth fund programmes. We have awarded a total of **52 grants**, totalling **£613,256**. These grants aimed to benefit over 20,600 people across the geographical areas included within the funds.

Of the 82 applications we originally received: -

- 52 were approved by the panel.
- 17 were rejected by the panel.
- 13 were cancelled/withdrawn.

Foundation staff spend an increasing amount of time supporting applicants pre the application process and during to help them provide the best quality bids possible. The BLCF Grants Team continue to support applicants to ensure they have good governance and strong financial reserves in place to support their sustainability. Applications that have been withdrawn/cancelled is usually because they did not meet the criteria for the funding stream, have the proper structure/governance in place or have applied and secured funding elsewhere. The success rate of applications to Luton Rising funds reflects this additional work and commitment of the BLCF with 63% of applications receiving funding.

It is key that we manage expectations of applicants and, as we see application levels rise, we are keen to see the funds available matching with the demands being experienced. This is particularly relevant given the rise in quality in applications, with the additional support from the BLCF grants team, and would therefore enable us and the community panels to continue to fund those projects/initiatives that have the potential to provide good impact locally.

Due to the rise in applications and limited funds available, we at times need to make the decision to close funds early to balance against the funds available and capacity of the team to manage assessments. This has been the case particularly for applications that cover the near neighbour geographical areas, where we have continued to experience high levels of demand. Data around this was recently sent to the main contact we work with at Luton Rising, where we indicated the demand over the last few years for this geographical area, as follows;

- **2021-22 - 49 applications** received with requests for a total of **£451,102**
- **2022-23- 37 applications** received with requests for a total of **£237,048**

- **2023-24 to date - 38 applications** received, total £303,308 (this is only halfway through our financial year). At this rate we estimate over 60 applications by the end of the year.

As we go forward BLCF will work with Luton Rising to review all our funds from 2024, to explore more levels of funding to improve access and reduce barriers, but with a close view of the levels of requests against capacity of the team.

## List of grants per funding programme

### Small Grants

Organisation	Project Summary	Amount awarded	No of est. beneficiaries
Five Pillars Community Group	Provision of hot meals and food packs to support refugees living in hotels and overflow accommodation in Luton	£9,280.00	1500
Wigmore Primary School	To clear an overgrown mini orchard on the school site and transform it into an outdoor learning area where fruits and vegetables are grown	£4,550.00	200
Ormiston Families	Breaking Barriers- preventative service supporting children and young people who are at risk of going into crime, violence, drug or alcohol abuse, and/or experiencing mental health difficulties.	£1,516.00	10
Maidenhall Primary School PTA	Sensory Garden and Interactive Projector for SEND Children	£9,677.00	677
Beech Hill Community Primary School charity Fund account	Community day out to the coast to encourage community cohesion and foster good mental health following lockdown and many community bereavements.	£1,880.00	490
Youth Network CIC	A youth climate conference for young people aged 11-25, led by young people. Two days covering workshops on climate issues and launch of a prize for social action projects. The event will inform and educate, enable young people to engage with social action, develop skills through mentoring and enthuse young people to advocate in Luton for a greener future.	£2,750.00	135
Opportunities Highlighting Compassionate Change	OHCC Artspire Program is a 6 month tutored workshop series focused on skills for a career in industry, using with transferable skills from creativity into wider employment opportunities.	£5,466.00	40
Several Seats C.I.C	Mindfulness meditation and art therapy activities at The Hat Factory in Luton for women from communities facial racial discrimination who are struggling with mental health.	£10,000.00	80
Women's Aid Luton	Purchase of new laptops to utilise specialist system for data capture and monitoring.	£9,479.00	48
ACCDF	Events to bring the community together to reflect and pay respects to the victims of the transatlantic slave movement. To educate people and foster future community cohesion.	£2,000.00	1000
RVF Academy	Disadvantaged young people from Luton will take part in creative workshops focussing on developing skills in film making, production and other skills in the creative sector.	£5,000.00	50

	The project aims to improve participants future employment prospects, self-esteem, confidence and personal skills.		
Heritage Associates	Promoting community cohesion within the community-Windrush event	£1,500	90
Luton Neighbourhood Watch	Grant to allow them to purchase necessary equipment for use for training and for presentations to help training both new and ongoing for volunteers and for presentations to communities.	£500.00	1000
Signposts	Refurbishment of kitchen	£5,591.00	50
Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Charity on behalf of "Take HeART"	Installation of a new, large-scale artwork and exhibition, provision of artistic wellbeing workshops for members of NHS staff and a celebration of thanks for staff based in the Luton Hospital Site during the Queen's Jubilee Weekend.	£1,060.00	600
Eggington Foresters Cricket Club	Purchase of Roller for the Club	£3,000.00	500
Luton Roma Trust	Ensuring the sustainability of LRT	£2,000.00	1000
Transitions UK	Theatre workshops and concluding performance involving young people with disabilities developing knowledge and skills in areas of theatre production, set design, script-writing, filming, music and performance. Collaboration with Wild Geese Theatre Company.	£2,000.00	100
A Creative Expression Ltd	Quality arts and crafts group for women and children to foster community cohesion, reduce isolation and loneliness and develop crafting skills.	£10,000.00	90
Lords Taverners	Free community cricket programme for children aged 9-19 in Luton paired with workshops to address antisocial behaviour, deprivation and encourage good mental health and wellbeing.	£10,000.00	488
Luton Town Centre Chaplaincy	Establishment of Chaplains in Stopsley, Lewsey and the Centre of Luton (excluding the mall) to provide a non judgemental, listening ear to anyone who may need one. Signposting to other organisations for support as and when required.	£5,263.00	150
Oak Community Services CIC	Individuals & families will benefit from mediation resulting in conflict resolution and improved relationships with family members.	£10,000.00	80
Revolution Fitness	Free exercise classes and sports activities for women from communities facing racial discrimination, especially from within the Muslim community, paired with the creation of a grant pot for women to access funds to purchase appropriate sportswear and equipment to ensure women can participate safely and in comfort.	£5,000.00	215
	Woodlands 12 week arts project for young people with complex needs	£4,950.00	50

Next Generation Youth Theatre CIC			
Luton Sea Cadets	Capital grant to create shower block to enable young people to take part in watersports, camping and bushcraft activities and overnight stays.	£10,000.00	500
Bushmead ladies club	A weekly social club for members with activities, trips and visiting speakers. They celebrate Easter and Christmas with special events and also arrange other trips sporadically throughout the year.	£3,200.00	30
Luton Town Bowls Club	Luton residents will be able to play bowls on a safe bowling green that meets Bowls England regulations. The club will be able to recruit new members, including disabled players, and host competitive games as a result of these improvements.	£10,000.00	75
Kokni Community Luton	Health and Wellbeing Project	£4,960.00	350
Go Dharmic	To provide homeless and elderly people regular hot and nutritious meals and care packages & provision of grocery kits to vulnerable families in Luton.	£10,000.00	5000
Cosmetic Toiletry & Perfumery Foundation	Confidence boosting workshops for women with cancer	£3,580.00	80
Leagrave Youth	Grant to help cover necessary insurance costs to enable them to continue running their activities for young people in Luton	£2,000.00	200
St Hughs Church	Children from disadvantaged backgrounds will have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument or attend dance and/or drama sessions.	£9,220.00	80

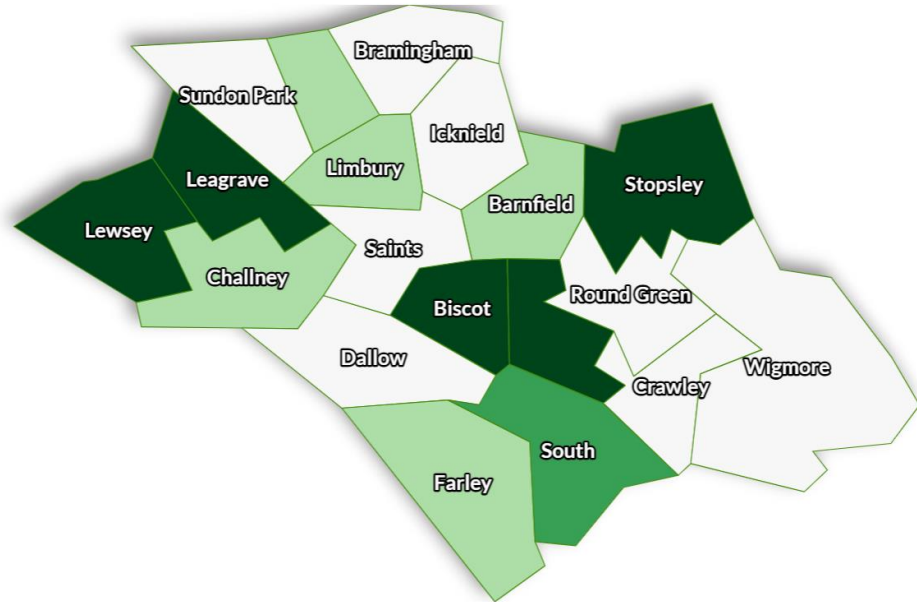
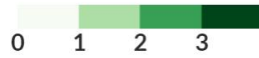
**PLEASE NOTE-** It is also important to note that the table above is based on the information provided to us at the initial application stage, whereby groups give estimated beneficiary figures, this data may change by the end of the piece of work/project.

All some of these grants have yet to complete, therefore not all impact and learning will be known at this stage.



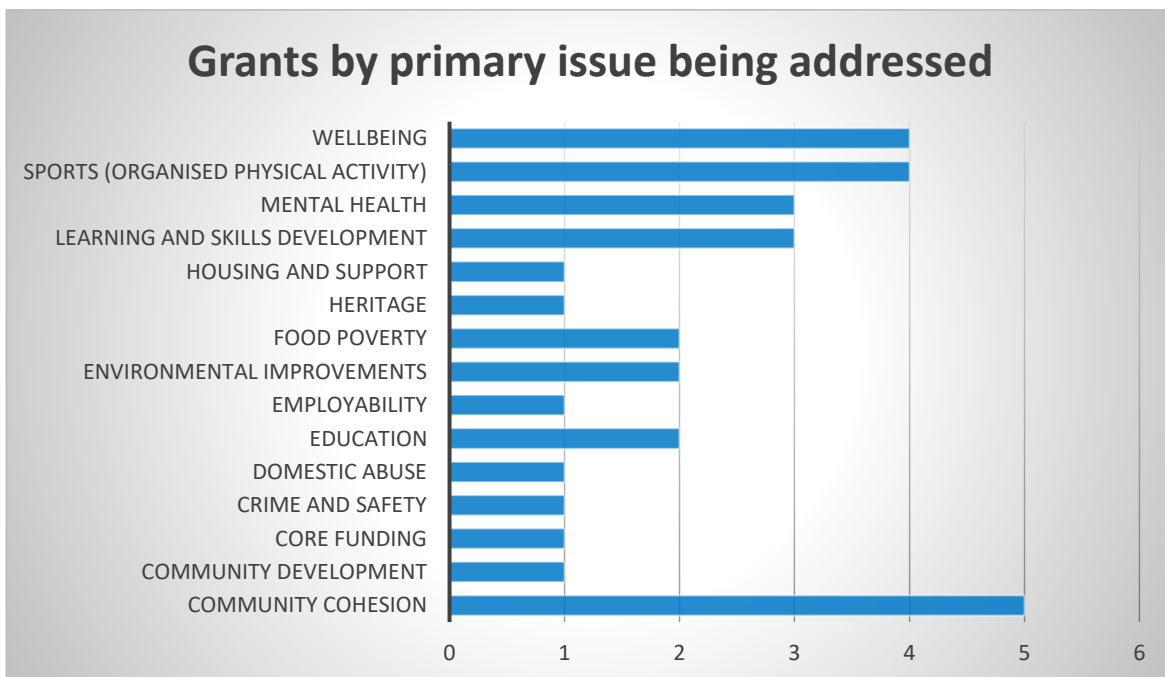
## Data Analysis

Grants Awarded per ward



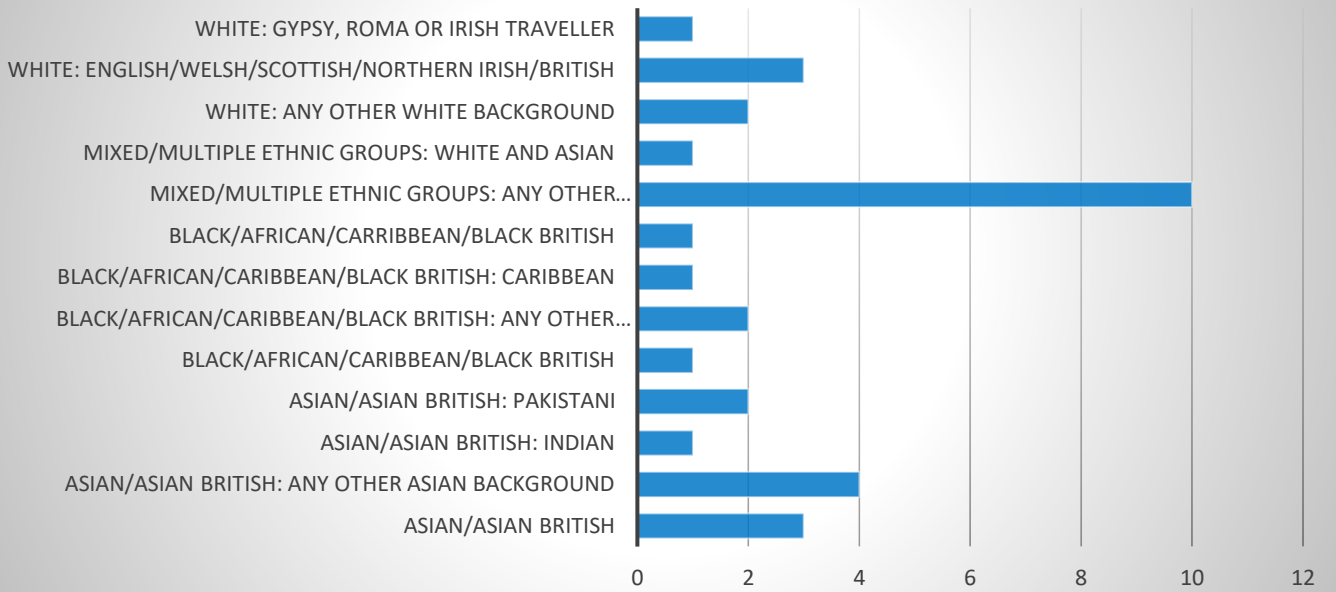
NB Ward areas are based on 2022 local authority ward areas detailed at that time

There were also 10 applications that stated they were delivering work across the whole borough OR at least 3+ ward areas. We are not able to include this in the above map.



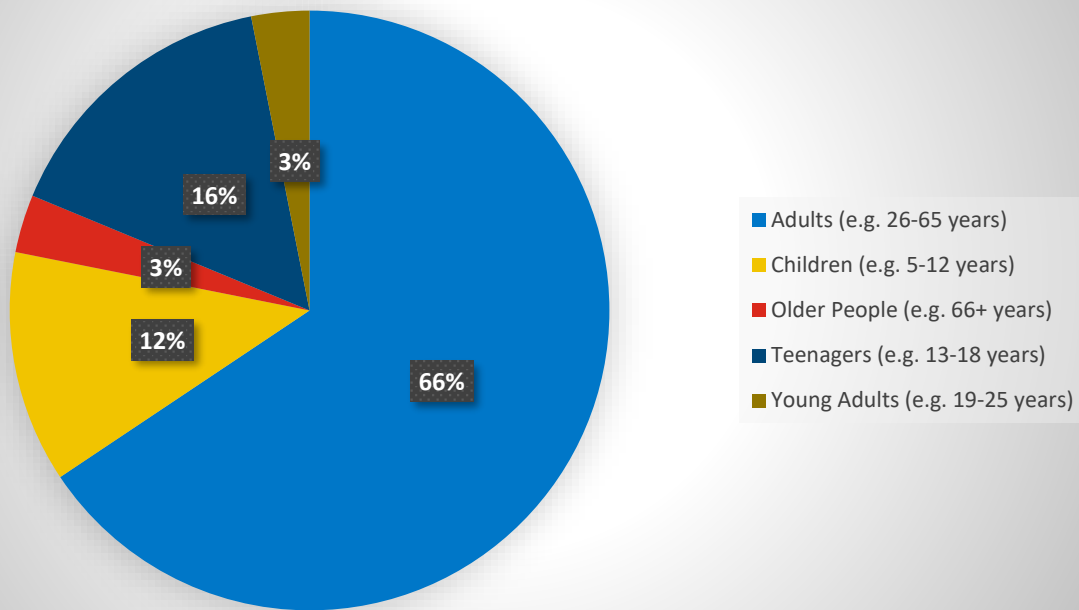
This graph demonstrates the variety of projects being funded. Organisations are asked to choose from a list of key primary issues, at application stage, with community cohesion, wellbeing and sport-based activity being the most popular focus in this funding period.

## Grants by main ethnicity



This graph demonstrates the **main beneficiary group** that they are intending to engage with. A large proportion of the groups being funded, have indicated that their projects/delivery will support multiple different communities. We have outlined the main categories in the above chart, with the actual number of grants awarded to support those communities. NB The foundation continues to review how it can connect with the most diverse areas on the Borough and our work with FREA will help us evolve and change how we build on evidencing this moving forward.

## Grants by primary age



The largest percentage of requests were to support adult age groups under this programme, although often many organisations do serve more than 1 age group, but for the purposes of impact reporting groups are asked to identify the primary age group.

## Luton Youth Fund

NB All grants funded were for projects working with between 11-18 year olds due to the nature of the priorities of this programme.

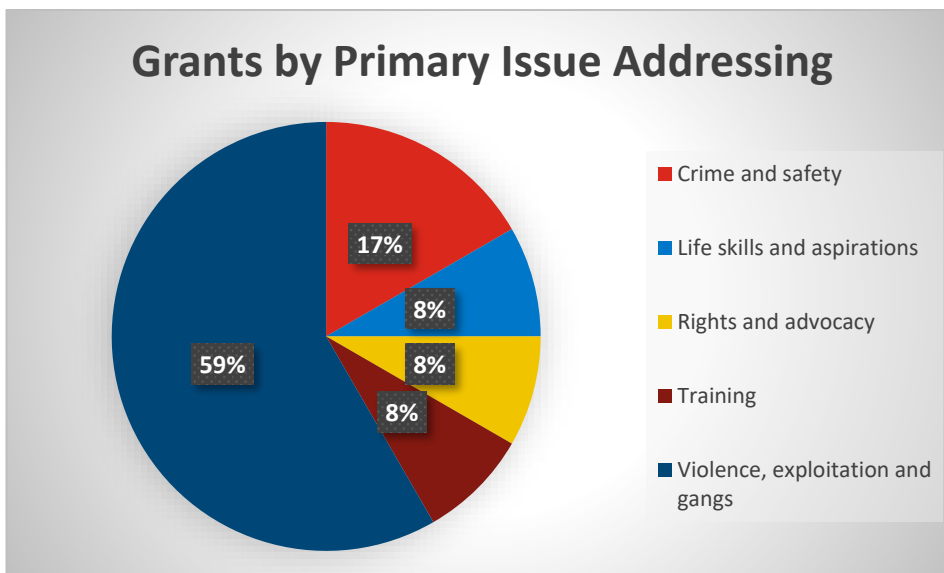
Organisation	Project Summary	Amount awarded	No of est. beneficiaries
ATTIOTIVE Social Enterprise (Formerly MF Youth Consultants)	A programme to educate young people about policing and the police on young people's perception of policing	£13,400.00	150
Boxing Saves Lives CIC	Boxing project leading to mentoring for young people in school at risk of CCE and gang association	£37,465.00	50
BrightPaths Support CIC	A mentoring programme for schools tackling exploitation and gang association and its negative consequences	£16,387.00	100
Caudwell Youth	A mentoring project for young people in Luton	£48,000.00	28
Community Development and Growth CIC	A project for parents raising awareness and building tools to use with their children on youth violence, gang association and exploitation	£33,000.00	260
Crescent Summer School CIC	Mentoring and positive activities programme for BAME young people in Luton	£49,988.00	500
Luton Town Football Club Community Foundation	A youth work outreach project educational and football element to address ASB and criminality	£49,500.00	150
Mary Seacole Housing Association Ltd	Project to complement the TREE project which is addressing, and reducing exploitation with young people, conducting joint outreach work across the area. The Tapp Out outreach and intervention service will work with users to encourage discussion debate and learning.	£29,600.00	300
One Stop Advice and Training Centre	A mentoring and awareness raising project focusing on youth violence, exploitation and gang association for parents in Dallow area of Luton	£40,000.00	20
St Giles Trust	A prevention service supporting young people in school at risk of or involved in child criminal exploitation	£20,944.00	100
Ua mma Ltd	Weekly sessions covering MMA, Muay and Thai kickboxing aimed at children and young people aged 11 to 18 including young girls	£30,000.00	150
YouTurn Futures	A project contributing to breaking the cycle of those young people at risk of gang association and youth violence	£38,000.00	20

**PLEASE NOTE**-All some of these grants have yet to complete, therefore not all impact and learning will be known at this stage.

## Data Analysis

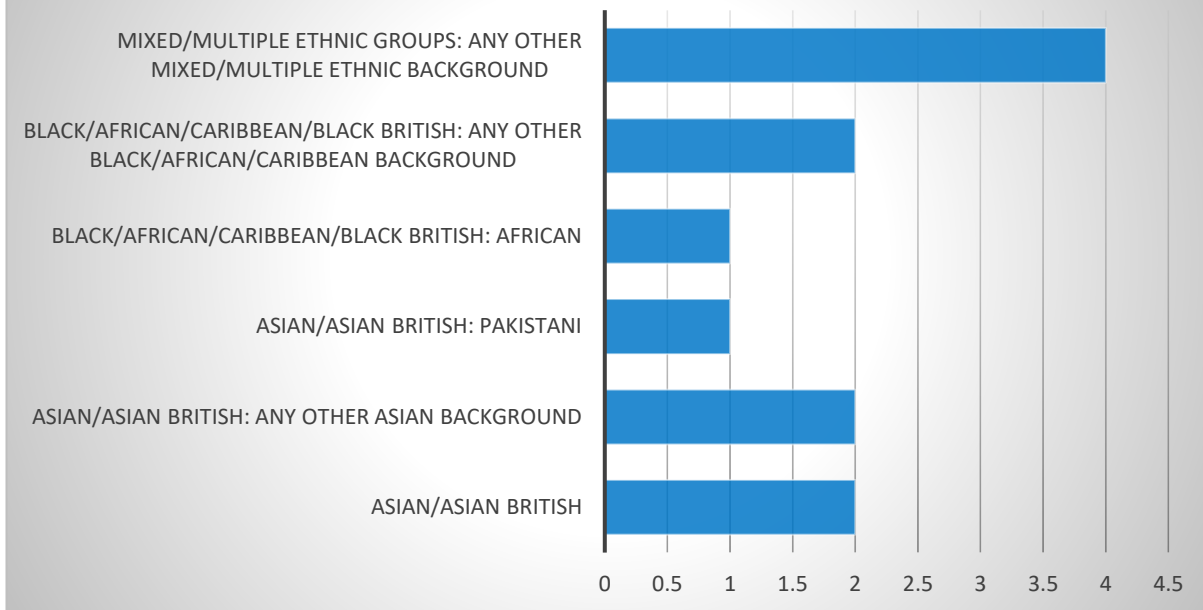
Ward area	No. of grants
Barnfield	1
Biscot	1
Dallow	3
High Town	1
Northwell	3
Multiple wards*	3

\*(3 or more wards were identified/whole of borough delivery). We have not presented this information in a heat map, due to the relatively small number of grants awarded under this programme and the small selection of wards identified. Many groups indicate at application stage, their intention to deliver either across the borough or in multiple wards, so we have provided this within the table to this effect.



Whilst all grantees apply with a focus around gang associated behaviour, serious youth violence or sexual exploitation, they may also identify other issues they are addressing or what their project will centre around. We have outlined these additional areas in the chart above.

## Grants by primary beneficiary ethnicity



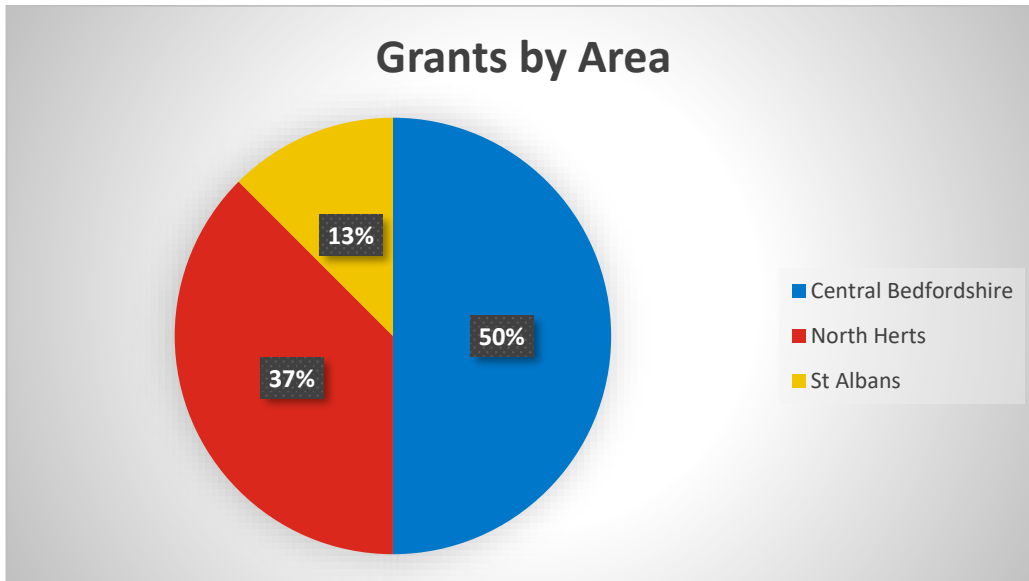
We are pleased to have seen a shift with groups providing better evidence around the young people they are supporting through their work in the community. Often many groups do work with many different diverse community groups and may therefore indicate a mixed/multiple ethnic group option for the ethnicity category. We are also continuously reviewing our processes to help improve the reporting by groups to us. This includes the evidence required around impact reporting and outcomes achieved, particularly where organisations are in receipt of significant funding.

## Near Neighbours

Organisation	Project Summary	Amount awarded	No of est. beneficiaries
Angels Support Group Hitchin	To help fund the charity's twice weekly and 3 x termly programme of workshops and support groups to parents/carers with children on the Autistic spectrum	£5,000.00	210
Breachwood Green	Website maintenance, advertising/communication expenses and litter collection	£700.00	1100
Communities 1st	AbletoEnable project- to provide advice and training to create a skilled workforce that meets the needs of local employers and create job opportunities for local residents.	£5,000.00	50
Food etc	Practical cookery workshops in Shefford, Central Bedfordshire, for 30 pupil premium children and 30 parents to teach good nutrition, alternatives to take-away food and encourage family mealtimes.	£4,410.00	60
Kimpton Folk Events (KFE)	People from the local area will have access to a free, community Folk music event with live performances and music, dance and craft workshops for all ages to enjoy.	£1,500.00	1200
Out of Class	The project will support teenagers with SEND through a 4-week interactive course where the participants undertake pre-planned tasks with trained therapy ponies.	£4,940.00	18
Respite at Home Volunteers West Mid Beds & Ivel Valley	Volunteer service providing respite care for carers and people living with a life-limiting condition.	£5,000.00	25
Southill Parish Council	New play equipment for the village play area to appeal to a wider age group and provide equipment for disabled young people.	£5,000.00	1200

**PLEASE NOTE**-All some of these grants have yet to complete, therefore not all impact and learning will be known at this stage.

## Data Analysis



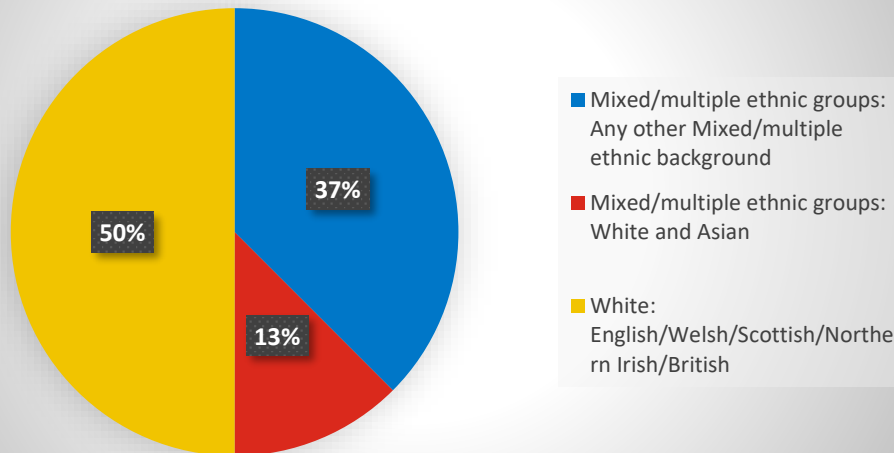
BLCF have been undertaking more 'meet the funder' opportunities across the funding area this programme covers, in particular the North Herts area. This has seen an increase in the number of applications over the last few years. We have 2 funds that cover these geographical areas, one under Luton Rising and another under London Luton Airport Operations. Constant demand on these funds have meant many organisations are not able to be funded, compared to funds available. Please see the recommendation section for further considerations.

List of issues being addressed	No. of grant applications
Arts	1
Employability	1
Environmental improvements	1
Food poverty	1
Isolation and loneliness	2
Learning and skills development	1
Mental health	1

BLCF have 53 possible options of primary Issues that organisations can select at application stage, to indicate the focus of the work they wish to be funded for. This extensive list is a resource that the wider UK Community Foundation network uses also.

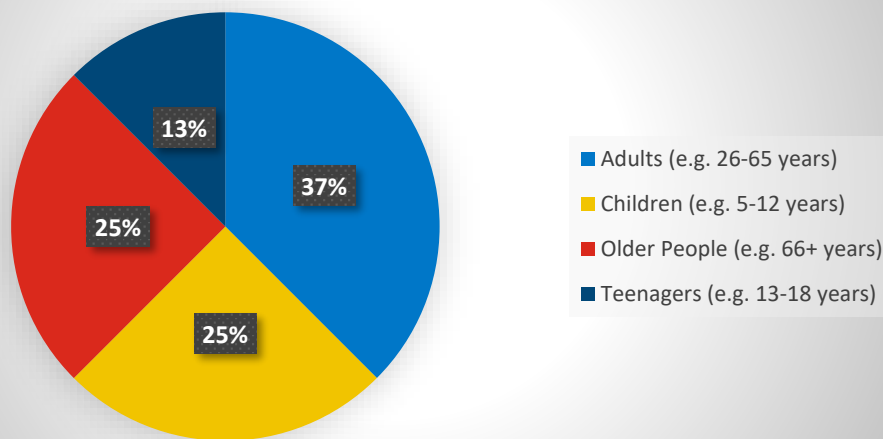
As you will note, with the small numbers of applications being able to be funded (due to limitations around the funding pot available), there is only a small selection of issues identified. However, it is worth noting that often organisations will often address multiple issues through funded projects/initiatives. For the purpose of this data analysis, we are only including the **primary** issue identified by organisations.

## Grants by main ethnicity



We are starting to see an improvement around demographic data from groups. This in part, is because we removed the 'all ethnicities' option that was previously included in reporting templates. This has encouraged groups to collect more accurate demographical information about those people in the community that they support. For the near neighbours' fund, by the nature and make up of the areas covered, this often isn't hugely diverse, and groups seem to be working with predominately white British or those from other white backgrounds ethnicities.

## Grants per main age group



62% of the grants awarded were to support adults or older people focussed activities, which is representative of the geographical areas' projects are delivering in. There is, however, generally a good spread across most age groups, apart from 0-4yr olds and young adults (19-25).



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## Summary of Challenges experienced by grantees

There were 3 common issues/challenges raised across grantees. These were:

1. **Recruitment**- difficulties in finding appropriately skilled staff or attracting sufficient number of candidates to support their work. Additionally, this affected volunteer recruitment, with a decrease in interest experienced. This seems to be a continuation of an issue experienced during Covid, but that has been further impacted upon due to the current cost of living crisis.
2. **Securing further funding**- there is a lack of multi year funding generally available across funders, and the competition to secure this, when available, is fierce. Most groups did however indicate that they have been able to secure some funding to continue work, but in the main only for a further year of work. Funding being secured in this piecemeal way will affect meaningful impact and organisations truly being able to meet the needs of the community. Longer term preventative solutions are needed, rather than funding in a short term in a time limited approach.
3. **Increased demand for services**- the majority of groups funded expressed that demand often outstripped the resources available. This was most apparent with regards to the mental health service support or more complex work funded under this programme. This will no doubt be further compounded by the other issues we have highlighted also.

Given the current cost of living crisis it is unlikely that any of the above common issues can be quickly resolved, however BLCF continue to assist where we are able to, including signposting to the CVS for funding advice for organisations. We have also made a number of recommendations to consider moving forward (see page 13)

## Recommendations for future rounds.

Following our recent Vital Sign report 2023, conversations with local organisations, learning captured through monitoring reports and listening to feedback at various networking events etc. we would like to suggest several changes to any future funding rounds. We would recommend the following changes:

### **Small Grants and Luton Youth Fund:**

In line with our continued partnership with Luton Rising (LR) we are undertaking a full review of all LR grants and will ensure greater opportunities to pilot and test ideas and to support longer term impact work. Part of this review will help us gather clear regular data and ensure funded groups show a commitment to partnership working collaboratively.

- a) **Mitigate against duplication of work**- we regularly see groups working around the same focus e.g. mental health or youth provision. To encourage a more joined up approach we have piloted funds with a focus around collaboration and partnership. A priority for future rounds of this fund should continue to encourage this direction for groups, to better work together in a more considered and cohesive way. We would therefore like to run a round, under Small Grants and Luton Youth Fund, with this focus in mind. Grants would be up to £50,000 for partnership/collaborative bids, over a 2 year funding period. This would be for bids from partnerships with a minimum of 3 groups working together to deliver projects/initiatives.

- b) **Micro grants**- introduce a micro grant level (£1500 or less) to encourage smaller groups to access funding. This will be a less intensive application process, using a simplified application form and criteria. BLCF will also be able to encourage good practice, getting these groups ready to develop larger scale projects/delivery moving forward (should they wish).

## Across all funds

- a) **Build funding programme pots**- the 3 programmes have experienced a reduction in funding over the last few years. We would like to build these back over the next few years, to previous levels. We continue to see significant demand to funding programmes. This is particularly relevant should we progress with a focus around a collaborative type fund, for groups to apply for a larger amount under small grants, with multiple partners. This would evidently need investment. Current funding pots stand at= Small grants £200k per year (previously £500k), Luton Youth Fund is currently £290,235 (previously £393,000) and Near Neighbours £25k (previously £100k).
- i. We are experiencing significant demand in the number of applications received from groups delivering work in the Near Neighbours geographical areas. See page 5 of this report for further information. Staff have also forwarded information about this to the Luton Rising main contact for consideration.
- b) **Core costs** –this area continues to be a key issue for organisations, with limited funders permitting these costs to be included in bids. At present we set a threshold within our grant criteria to limit how much organisations can apply for in this area, this is currently 10%. With rising costs, we feel it is prudent to increase this across all our funds to 15%.

## Pictures & case studies/testimonies from Grantees

We have now received a few end of grant reports from some of the organisations funded during this period. Due to timescale of grant (which is 1 year on average) we do not have all reports back at present. Please see a selection of case studies/feedback\* below.

\*please note that donors are unable to use these images without permission first being sought.

### 1. Luton Youth Fund

#### BrightPaths Support CIC

##### Case Study 2: Tom's Story, Year 8, LU1

Tom, a vibrant Year 8 boy with ADHD, had a challenging time at school and in the community. He frequently got into trouble, which posed concerns about his well-being and safety. Reports indicated that he was often found in the town centre with older boys known to the police.

Tom's impulsivity and behaviour issues at school and in his community significantly impacted his life.

Tom's journey with BrightPaths began with a strong desire to talk and share his thoughts. From the first session, he craved someone who would listen and guide him without judgment. The program offered a safe and non-judgmental space for him to express himself.

Sessions with Tom focused on improving his conduct and pro-social behaviour. He found solace in talking openly about his experiences, challenges, and aspirations.

He gained valuable strategies, including recognising his body's warning signs to identify when he felt safe or unsafe. Additionally, the program delved into the complexities of peer pressure, teaching Tom how to say no, who to speak to, and the qualities of a good friend.

After participating in BrightPaths, Tom experienced significant positive changes in his behaviour and outlook. He recognised the importance of having someone to talk to who "gets it" without making it uncomfortable.

Tom's feedback: *"You helped a lot. I got to talk about things that matter to me, and you listened. I know so many people who need somebody like you to talk to, somebody who gets it and doesn't make it cringe."*



## Boxing Saves Lives CIC

“Our work with Farley Junior Academy saw some awesome growth for their boys and girls, especially those SEND children. We wrote at the time of how important this year group is, and how early intervention can make for a smooth transition to high school. We have seen children flourish in Stockwood Park Academy, Lea Manor and Challney boys also, who have developed under our Youth Fund opportunities at Farley. Several of these young people were 121 interventions who had shown worrying behaviours. Yet they have utilised their Boxing Saves Lives skills of resilience and discipline to make the most of their new school and friendship groups.

The Luton Youth is a huge building block in Boxing Saves Lives and allows us to enhance the lives of boys and girls all over the town. Taking away the financial burden for children and schools means that we can get to work immediately and be accessible everywhere. The feedback from Headteachers and Senior Leadership teams has been universally positive, and this is only possible because of amazing children and the funding that makes their lives so much easier.

Boxing Saves Lives is fast becoming a household name in Bedfordshire and beyond and so much of this is because we have been able to showcase the incredible work we do in our hometown Luton through the Luton Youth Fund.” - JP, Boxing Saves Lives CIC



## 2. Small Grants

### Hope Church (Edible High Town)- Storytime in the High Town Peace Garden

“We ran an engaging 2-hour storytime event for children and adults in the High Town Peace Garden. Our primary audience was for local children aged 5 to 9, and their families. This was the first time we used any of our gardens for a performing arts event in one of the pocket gardens our community gardening group looks after. It was a successful pilot for a low-key, acoustic cultural event in our spaces. Local families could (re)-discover a pocket park on their doorstep and experience creative activities in an outdoor space.

We commissioned a Luton actor to perform a piece based on a new children’s book by a Luton author. The result was a high-quality experience for the audience. The question and answer session at the end was an opportunity for children to reflect and articulate their thoughts and ask their questions. It was really popular and the actor and the author's answers helped children get an idea of what inspires



people to write literature, and how actors and directors turn these into performances. After the performance, there was time for outdoor play”

### Five Pillars- hot meals and food pack provision

5Pillars specialises in providing 'Hot Meals (freshly prepared and ready to use)' in and around Luton. With the aim to provide hot meals and food packs across following two demographics:

- 1- Vulnerable individuals and a families in residential accommodation in Luton.
- 2- Refugees who are staying in Hotel rooms across Luton

**Note**-This project is still in progress but they have provided an update about their progress so far.



“We have provided hot meals and clothing to the vulnerable local people and also refugees residing in the hotels across Luton. The refugees in the hotels were from a range of nationalities, however, the food provided in the hotels was mainly English style and individual needs were not catered. With the help of this funding, 5Pillars successfully managed to cater the needs of service users from various nationalities. Our hot meals has provided a breathing

space to the refugees by offering food that was similar to their cultural food. 5Pillars has always aimed to deliver with commitment, sincerity, respect, dignity & transparency. We promote dignity in every aspect of charity and support programs for most needy and vulnerable”.

### Lord Taverners -Wicketz community cricket programme

“We have more than 400 participants coming to our sessions weekly. We are not only changing lives of our participants but also lives of their parents by educating them on healthy eating and the effects of regular exercise. We have created a parents tea party group where parents walk round the cricket field after dropping their kids and every parent brings tea for the rest of the parents in the group so they enjoy a healthy activity while there kids are playing cricket.



AM and his family are a prime example of this. AM joined wicketz as a participant and now his entire family is a part of the wicketz family. His mom has just completed her coach support worker course and is now an active volunteer with wicketz, his sister is the captain of our women and girls team and is also our lead on the youth voice forum at wicketz Luton. Being south Asian many parents never took girls cricket or sports seriously, but we are educating the parents on the importance of girls in sport.”

### 3. Near Neighbours

Note- We only have an update from one group for this funding period to date, as all groups still in progress with projects. We have, however, received some impact information from the previous year grants\*, that were received recently and included below.

#### Food Etc

Food etc works with a range of disadvantaged families and other groups in and around Bedfordshire to teach them how to cook cheap, tasty, and nutritious meals. This includes ESL students, adults with mental health challenges, young carers and women who have suffered domestic abuse. However, the majority of their work is with parents with young children who come to Food etc’s cookery workshops to learn how to cook together and then eat as a group.

Food etc’s founder and director Julie Clay said: “I am a firm believer in food being about community and it’s the glue that pulls communities together. Whether that community is family, peers or work colleagues cooking and eating together brings with it a whole range of physical and mental health benefits beyond simply eating better.”



These benefits include helping to develop the confidence of the course attendees. By trying food and cooking skills that are new to them they learn that going outside of your comfort isn't always scary and can be enjoyable too. Cookery also touches on several areas of numeracy including weighing, proportioning and estimating without people realising they are doing "maths".

"Pupils and parents really enjoyed the opportunity to cook together. It gave the children an opportunity to make new friends for parents to get to know each other, strengthening our school community. It also gave parents an opportunity to meet with school staff who helped at various sessions, breaking down barriers and improving parental engagement with the school." - Helena Price, Pupil Premium Champion

### Road Victims Trust-

\*\*This is a previous grant and the impact report has been received in this funding period (22-23)\*\*

The Road Victims Trust (RVT) provide free emotional and practical support to all persons affected by the trauma of fatal and life-changing collisions.

Feedback from 2 service users-

"RVT has changed my life. Not only from the support they show but I find so much meaning and pride in giving back, as this is what (Deceased) would have wanted. Honestly from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for your support through a very hard time in my life"

"The Counsellor was brilliant; she was patient and understanding and helped greatly with my loss. I feel that due to covid my counselling took much longer to reach the point of completion. The one-to-one sessions were working very well but having to revert to telephone sessions slowed down the process as I ran out of things to say and avoided some of the questions. I feel that one-to-one sessions should have continued as soon as covid restrictions past as this is a much better way. You can see body language and facial expressions which is how you judge a person's true feelings".



#### Testimony from the organisation-

"The funding from Luton Rising has made a significant impact on the ability of the RVT to provide a sustainable method of providing post-collision support. . The years of the Covid pandemic, followed by the cost-of-living crisis, has had a detrimental effect on the RVT community fundraising effort. There has been a

noted down-turn in fundraising events, and an understandable reluctance by grant making foundations to release funds. The funding provided has allowed for much needed sustainability."

## Summary

BLCF distributed **52 grants** totalling **£613,256** during this funding period, across the 3 grant programmes.

Organisations have started to recoup some of their losses over Covid but are battling other challenges around recruitment and funding. BLCF strives to listen and learn from the organisations we engage with, regardless as to whether they receive grant funding or access other work we deliver (e.g. INSIGHT). Therefore, to ensure funding programmes continue to meet the needs of the charitable sector, we will need to evolve and change the priorities moving forward, through discussions with Luton Rising and other donors whom we work with.

We have made several recommendations within this report, which we view as key areas to implement moving forward. We continue to build strong relationships with local groups, who are often working with those most vulnerable in the community. With the growing demands due to the rise in cost of living it is more vital now, than ever, to invest and support the local VCSE sector, that local residents lean on for support.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss the contents of this report with Luton Rising representatives and for further information on anything covered within this document please email [Francesca.Johnstone@blcf.org.uk](mailto:Francesca.Johnstone@blcf.org.uk)

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