



**FOUNDATION
OF LIGHT**

THE WORLD AT YOUR FEET



**MORE THAN
FOOTBALL**
2024-25

It started with a belief

Twenty-five years ago, the Foundation of Light began with a simple belief that by working together, we could create brighter futures for our communities.

Since 2001, that belief has grown into an organisation that changes lives every day, supporting young people, strengthening families and bringing opportunity, wellbeing and hope to thousands across the North East.

What makes me most proud is not just what has been built, but how it has been built, with compassion, commitment and an unwavering focus on people.

From the earliest programmes to the Beacon of Light and beyond, the Foundation has always stayed true to its purpose.

As we celebrate 25 years, we do so with gratitude and confidence. The belief that started this journey remains as strong as ever, and the future is full of promise.

Sir Bob Murray CBE
Chairman, Foundation of Light




Sir Bob Murray, CBE back where it all began



Celebrating Volunteers Week with Foundation volunteers



North East Mayor Kim McGuinness opens the new Nissan Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Skills Unit

Who we are

We're the official charity of Sunderland AFC, with a simple yet bold mission: to help individuals, families and communities live happier, healthier lives. Through sport, education, wellbeing and opportunity-building programmes, we support people of all ages. Whether it's getting active through sport, gaining confidence in lifelong learning, or accessing job-ready skills, we're here.



Foundation of Light is celebrated at the Stadium of Light

What we do

Our work spans lots of life-changing areas:

- Education – learning pathways, apprenticeships and scholarships.
- Sport – inclusive sessions for all ages and abilities.
- Community – tackling isolation, unemployment and inequality head-on.
- Wellbeing – programmes that strengthen body and mind.

Each year we reach thousands of people across the region from those aged 18 months to 94 years, helping them step into brighter opportunities and stronger futures. Our home is the Beacon of Light in Sunderland, a welcoming space for sport, education, creativity and community connection. From here and through outreach hubs, schools and sports fields, we deliver support that genuinely changes lives.

Why it matters

We believe that everyone deserves a chance to thrive. With the support of volunteers, partners and donors, every step forward becomes a shared success, from young people discovering their potential to families building resilience and confidence together. Donations stretch even further: for every £1 invested, we deliver around £16 worth of social value back into the community. (Premier League Social Value Report 2024-25)

We are Education

Over the last 12 months, our work in education has continued to grow in scale, depth and impact.

We delivered over 600,000 hours of learning, working with more than 25,000 young people and adults across 131 schools, colleges and alternative education settings across the North East.

Through our expanding in-school provision, we have worked more closely with primary and secondary schools, embedding Foundation staff in schools, building long-term relationships, and supporting young people facing challenges around confidence and attendance.

Our intervention work continues to show powerful results, 74% of secondary pupils receiving one-to-one support improved their confidence. We are supporting students most at risk of exclusion with mentoring, career guidance and progression planning, with 45% now feeling better equipped to achieve their future career goals.

This year

96.2%

English pass-rate and 93.8% Maths pass-rate for post-16 learners



Pupils of all ages supported through our in-school provision

This year

100%

said their aspirations had improved

Our post-16 football and education pathways continue to change lives. While students often join for football, they leave with so much more, Maths and English achievement soared to 93.8% and 96.2%, with 100% Functional Skills English passes.

Working in partnership with Sunderland College, we supported 61 learners on NEET pathways, including young people who had been disengaged from education for years, helping them achieve qualifications, rebuild confidence and progress into further learning and employment.

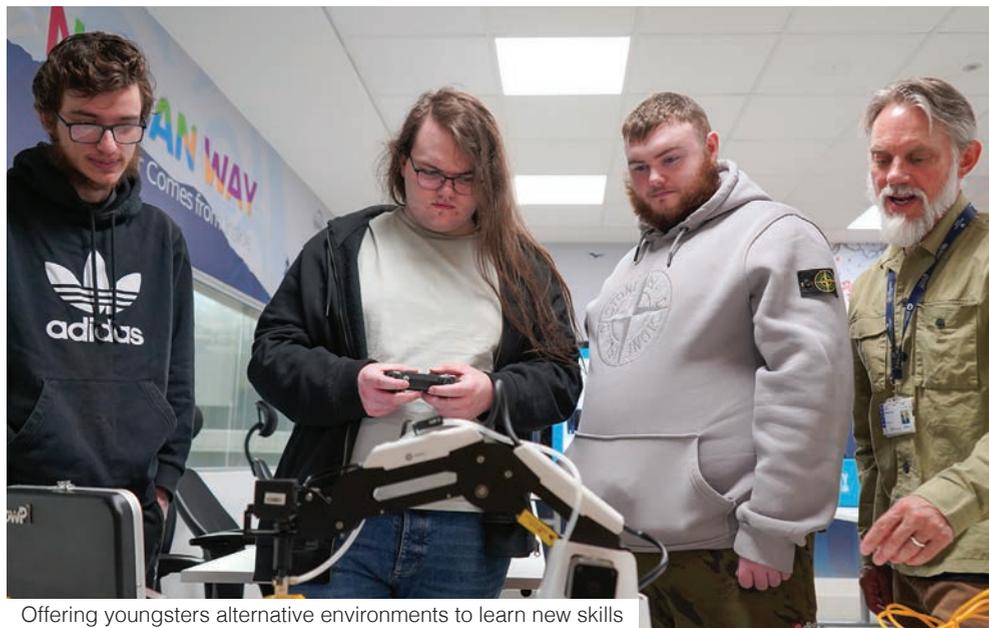
Across our skills, employability and further training programmes, we supported 934 young people and adults this year, many of those had previously struggled in traditional education environments.

This year

53%

of learners achieved next-step progression

From careers discovery in our World of Work Zone, immersive digital learning launching in 2026, and innovative partnerships across education, health and industry, we are creating new routes into employment and training for young people and adults.



Offering youngsters alternative environments to learn new skills

Back in Class Amelia's Story

For Amelia, school used to feel like something to avoid. Struggling with her mental health, her confidence was low and her attendance was sporadic. Then she got involved with Foundation of Light's mentoring sessions.

Through weekly one-to-one with a Foundation tutor, Amelia found a safe place to talk, reflect and rebuild her confidence. That connection, sparked by shared passion for Sunderland AFC, helped her open up, tackle how she was feeling and take small steps back into school life.

Amelia now attends school regularly, enjoys her lessons and looks forward to each day. The change hasn't just been in her attendance, it has shown up in her confidence, her laughter with friends and her belief in what she can achieve.

Her story shows how using football's influence, trusted relationships and consistent support can re-engage young people with learning, helping them not just to attend, but to belong and thrive.



Amelia gets a helping hand thanks to the Foundation





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We are Sport

Opportunity at the Foundation means reaching people of every age, ability and background.

For many children, their journey begins with Little Dribblers, where football becomes their first experience of teamwork, listening, sharing and confidence. From there, they move into our junior programmes, holiday courses, school clubs and outreach sessions, building sporting ability, friendships and self-belief.

For those who show potential, commitment and ambition, the pathway continues through our Player Development Centre, scholarships, and post-16 football and education programmes, where young people train, study and develop the skills they need for life beyond the pitch.

This year alone thousands of young people accessed football pathways and coaching opportunities across Sunderland and beyond.

Over 750 girls per week now take part in female-only provision, a 300% increase in just 12 months.

Our scholars experienced national and international development opportunities, including residential camps and volunteering on overseas programmes, building confidence, independence and leadership.



Players from our Girls' Academy enjoying opportunities on the pitch and off the pitch

This year

74%

of over-55 participants improved access to healthy living activities

Through walking football, disability sport, inclusive holiday provision and over-55s programmes, the Foundation now offers lifelong access to physical activity and connection.

During school holidays, our expanded HAF (Holiday Activities and Food) provision ensured over 80 young people had access to activity, support and a healthy meal each day removing barriers so every child could take part.

This year

13

SEN schools supported, expanding access to inclusive sport and education

This year

500

people progressed into employment or training with our support



SAFC star Salis Abdul Samed enjoys meeting youngsters at the Beacon

We are Community

Every positive journey starts with connection, having someone in your corner can help people take their next step into education, training, volunteering and work.

Through school-based mentoring, targeted interventions and youth programmes, we supported young people facing some of the most complex challenges, including low confidence, disengagement from education, antisocial behaviour, mental health struggles and isolation.

This year, our youth teams were embedded in more schools and communities, building long-term relationships with pupils, families, teachers and local partners.

Our youth work programme continues to play a vital role in neighbourhoods across the region, providing safe, structured sessions where young people can play, talk, learn and feel part of something positive.

Through workshops, mentoring and tailored support, 69% of participants increased their knowledge of sexual health and many were supported away from risk and towards education, training and positive activities.

This is done through one-to-one mentoring, small group interventions, family engagement and providing safe spaces in schools and communities.

Connection is often the difference between aspiration and action. Through trusted relationships, one-to-one support and real-world exposure, we help young people navigate the transition from education into employment, by linking them to mentors, employers and meaningful opportunities.



Young people putting their new skills to the test

This year
83%
of participants felt less isolated

Through our over-55s provision, we help people stay active, connected and part of a community, reducing isolation and building friendships in a place where everyone belongs.

Our Family Learning programmes bring parents and carers into the heart of their child's education, creating shared experiences that strengthen confidence at home, in school and community. By learning together, families build trust, improve to support one another.

This year
66%
improved teamwork skills

This year
59%
felt more connected to their community



Over-55s session sharing laughs, bringing people together

Power of Peer Support

Ken's Story

Ken wasn't always comfortable talking about how he felt. After losing his partner, he found himself struggling with his mental health and sensing a disconnect from those around him.

Then he got involved with Foundation of Light's mental health programme, and everything started to shift.

Ken met others who understood what it was like to struggle, and he found a community where talking honestly was encouraged and supported. The more he engaged, the more confident he became, not just in sharing his own story, but in supporting others to share theirs too.

Ken didn't just benefit from the programme, he became a trained mental health ambassador, helping his peers to open up, connect and seek help when they need it.

What started as a place to heal became a place to give back.



Ken was able to give back thanks to the support of the Foundation



We are Wellbeing

Last year, our wellbeing work supported physical health, mental health, resilience and connection across every stage of life.

Mental wellbeing is now central to everything we do. Through our programmes we continued to build a growing movement of mental health advocates across the region, training 182 mental health ambassadors, creating safer, more supportive workplaces and schools.

Across our youth mentoring and intervention programmes, 77% of young people reported improved motivation and many described the Foundation as the first place they had ever felt properly listened to and supported.

Working in partnership with the NHS, we delivered specialist respiratory clinics from the Beacon of Light, combining clinical support with accessible activity sessions to aid recovery and long-term health.

Following the challenges of the past year, including periods of social tension across the region, the Foundation placed renewed focus on community cohesion, inclusion and connection.



Fitness sessions to support those of all abilities



One of our weekly women's mental health support sessions

This year
71%
of participants improved their physical health

Through school programmes, neighbourhood activity, and community events, including initiatives such as our over-55s provision, we created safe spaces for people to meet, move and talk.

By being present in schools and community spaces, we can spot issues early and offer support. This early-action approach helps people build resilience before challenges escalate, creating healthier outcomes for individuals.

This year
65%
reduced their weight through nutrition and activity support

This year
70%
of over-55s improved blood pressure

Our 2025 Highlights



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JAN

Trustee Jill Scott crowned our Premier League Community Captain with a surprise visit to recognise coach Katie Gibson.



FEB

Houghton Kieper Academy headed to St George's Park to compete in the next stage of the EFL Girls Cup, narrowly missing out on the final.



MAR

George Kailas gained a full-time job with Nissan after enrolling on our employability programme, in the Harrison Centre for Social Mobility at the Beacon.



APR

Foundation of Light dedicated matchday returned against Millwall, featuring a historic Wear One flag display.



MAY

In partnership with DWP, the Youth Hub at the Beacon is helping young people aged 18-24 take confident steps towards employment.



JUN

Over 500 young people took to the Stadium of Light turf to 'Play on the Pitch'.



JUL

Students from our alternative education provision and family learning programmes were recognised at a special awards evening.



AUG

Over 1,000 youngsters joined us at the Beacon during the summer holidays.



SEP

Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson, visited Sandhill View Academy to see our secondary school mentoring programme in action.



OCT

Our Gala Awards Dinner lit up the Beacon of Light, celebrating unforgettable entertainment and powerful stories.



NOV

We launched 'Together Through Sport', a first of its kind campaign designed to ensure every child in the North East gets access to sport.



DEC

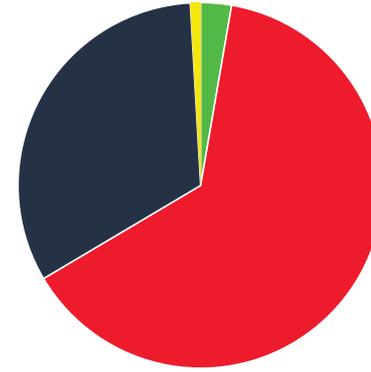
Our Girls Academy player Katie Bewick received a call up for England under-15s.

Finance

Our financial performance reflects a successful year demonstrating growth in both charitable and trading activities, the Group reported a trading EBITDA of £245,232 for the year.

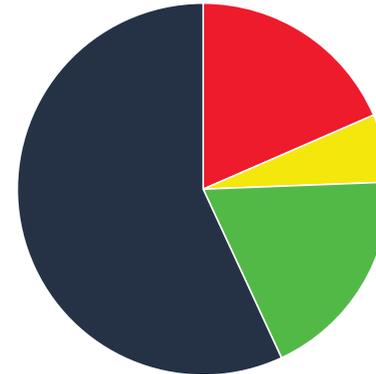


Flying the flag on Foundation matchday



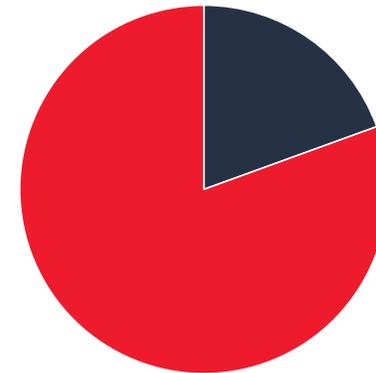
Total Group Income

- £3,114,277 Charitable Activities
- £1,604,136 Other Trading Activities
- £48,708 Investments
- £143,500 Donations and Legacies



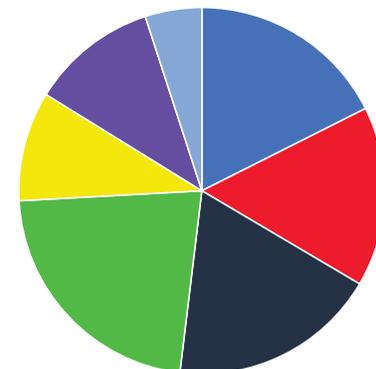
Income from Charitable Activities

- £664,694 Football Coaching sales
- £789,036 Government or Public Authorities Contracts
- £193,666 Sale of services as part of the Direct Charitable Activities
- £1,466,881 Performance Related Grants



Total Charitable Expenditure

- £907,688 Raising Funds
- £4,314,838 Charitable Activities



Expenditure by Charitable Activity

- £1,079,340 Sport and Play
- £678,999 Community
- £830,240 World of Work
- £432,738 Health
- £778,635 Education
- £390,272 Beacon of Light
- £124,614 Core



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Best still to come

Reflecting on another positive year and now looking ahead, one thing feels clear, our story is far from finished!

Over the last 25 years, the Foundation of Light has grown alongside our communities, shaped by their challenges, their resilience and their belief in what's possible.

We've reached hundreds of thousands of people, created safe and inspiring spaces, and shown time and again that football can be a powerful force for good. But the next chapter matters just as much.

Our Brighter Tomorrow strategy sets out a clear direction for the years ahead, being there for those who need us most, working collaboratively with partners across the region, and being bold enough to do things differently when it will create greater impact

From skills and employability, to connection, wellbeing and belonging, our focus is on opening doors and removing barriers, so more people can take hold of the opportunities coming their way.

At the heart of this is the Beacon of Light, not just a building, but a place to belong, to grow, and to shape what comes next for Sunderland and the wider region. Powered by our staff, volunteers, partners and supporters, we will continue to listen, learn and evolve.

Thank you to everyone who has been part of our journey so far. Together, we've built something strong. Together, we'll make sure the best is still to come.

Lesley Spuhler
CEO Foundation of Light



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NOW WE LOOK AHEAD

As we celebrate 25 years of the Foundation of Light, we are already focused on what comes next.



Our

Brighter Tomorrow

Strategy is built around three clear focus areas for the next five years.

Being Skilled

A level playing field for young people and vulnerable adults to uplift skills, confidence and aspirations.

Being Connected

Forging a sense of belonging and community cohesion.

Being Well

Harnessing sport and physical activity to live well and play well.

25 years on, we are more than football, and the best is still to come.

We will deliver our strategy by

Being There

A constant, trusted and inclusive presence across our communities in-person and virtually.

Being Collaborative

Strengthening impact through creative collaboration with our club and other key partners.

Being Bold

Continuously improving through growth, innovation, learning and ambition.

Fundraising to make a difference

When people choose to fundraise for the Foundation of Light, they're not just raising money, they're becoming part of something bigger. Alfie and Joe are a perfect example...

Two Sunderland supporters with no grand platform, just determination and belief, who took on the incredible challenge of running four marathons in four days from Sunderland to Sheffield - to get to Hillsborough Stadium in time to watch the Lads in action!

They pushed themselves to the limit because they believed in the Foundation's work and raised over £2,000 to help us make a difference!

Your challenge could be next, whether it's a run, a walk, a matchday fundraiser or something entirely your own, by fundraising for the Foundation of Light you'll be helping change lives.



Alfie and Joe on the road to Sheffield and arriving at Hillsborough Stadium

However you get involved, you make a difference

Partnership and Sponsorship: Align your business with life-changing work across education, employability, wellbeing and community connection.

Event Support: Sponsor or take part in flagship challenges and business-networking events that raise profile and impact.

Corporate Membership: Join other regional businesses in meaningful collaboration and shared community outcomes.

Team Volunteering: Harness the skills and passion of your employees to directly support programmes where they live and work.

No matter who you are, there's always a way that you can get involved in supporting our work.



**Scan the QR code to
find out how you can
get involved**

**You can also donate to support the
Foundation's life-changing work by texting...**

FOLFIVE to 70085 to donate £5 or via **JustGiving**
at [justgiving.com/safc](https://www.justgiving.com/safc)

(texts cost £5 plus one standard network rate message)



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Thank you

A special thank you to our....

PARTNERS

Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust
Arriva
Banks Group
Caterpillar UK Limited
Croda Foundation
Community Foundation North East
Durham Crime Commissioner
Durham County Council
Durham University
Education Partnership North East
EFL Trust
Gentoo
Harrison Centre for Social Mobility
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University of Sunderland
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Garfield Western Foundation
GC Arch Services
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My Civil Solutions
NE Activity Alliance
Newcastle International Airport
Newcastle University
Nissan
NHS North East
Northumbrian Water Ltd
Northumbria Violence Reduction Unit
Nuby
O'Brien Metal
Oculus HR
Paragon Group
Parkinsons UK
PBL Print
People Plus
Public Health
Red and White Army Trust
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Robertson Homes
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Rosie Page
SB Ironmongery
Siblings Nursery
Stafford Accountancy
Staff Power Group
Stagecoach North East
Stanley Area Action Partnership
Station Taxis
Steadfast Security Group
Sunderland Branch Liaison Committee
Sunderland CCG

Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance
Sweeney Miller Law
The FA
The Health Insurance Group
Troo
Together for Children
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TOX247
Utilink Consulting
Vertu Motors
Ward Hadaway
Washington Mind
Willis Towers Watson
Wearside Women in Need

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Ha'way the Little Dribblers

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*We also remember those supporters who are no longer with us, Mr Ian Kershaw and Mr Ron Turnbull, whose legacy lives on through the lives they helped change.

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