



**FOUNDATION  
OF LIGHT**

THE WORLD AT YOUR FEET

# YEAR OF IMPACT LIFETIME OF HAPPINESS



Foundationoflight.co.uk

# FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

This past year, the Foundation of Light has continued to stand as a cornerstone of hope and resilience for our community. Through our education, employability, health, and community programmes, we have provided life-changing opportunities to those who need them most, especially during challenging times.

The ongoing cost-of-living crisis has deepened the needs of our region, and the Foundation has risen to the challenge. By offering practical support and safe spaces, we have helped individuals and families take meaningful steps toward brighter futures.

Our impact is reflected in the lives we touch delivering almost half a million hours to over 23,000 people — young and old alike. Our youngest participant being 18 months and eldest 94! Whether its building confidence in children, supporting jobseekers, or promoting mental and physical wellbeing, the Foundation empowers people to overcome obstacles and embrace new opportunities.

Partnerships remain at the heart of what we do. Collaborations with local councils, universities, and corporate and charitable organisations have allowed us to innovate and expand our reach, while our employees and volunteers' dedication brings these initiatives to life.

The Beacon of Light remains a thriving hub for learning, growth, and community connection. From football pathways to support groups, it embodies our commitment to inclusion and progress.

As we reflect on our successes and prepare for the challenges ahead, our mission remains constant: to unite Sunderland and its surrounding areas with hope and opportunity.

**Sir Bob Murray CBE**  
Chairman, Foundation of Light



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# ABOUT US

**Foundation of Light is the award-winning official charity of Sunderland AFC, and we play a significant role in harnessing the love of football to make a real impact on the lives of our communities in the North East.**

We deliver over 50 programmes every year and have a proven track record of supporting people of all ages and backgrounds with the tools they need to live happier and healthier lives.

We do this by addressing key challenges including poverty, physical and mental health, by providing opportunities for young people as well as delivering employability training. Foundation of Light champion an environment where everyone, regardless of background, age or ability has the opportunity to do more and be more.

Being one of the first ever football foundations, we have a rich history with many firsts and major achievements across the sector including the development of family learning through football and the building of the Beacon of Light, the Foundation's vibrant community hub situated on Kier Hardie Way.

In the last 22 years we have invested over £50 million into local communities and worked with over a million people.

## WE ARE PROUD OF:

- Our association with SAFC
- Our history, culture and track record
- Our people, staff, ambassadors and networks
- The way we develop innovative and responsive solutions to community problems
- The bespoke customer service we offer
- Beacon of Light



### OUR VISION

Better Opportunities  
Better Lives

### OUR MISSION

We are here to use the power of football to invest in the communities we serve and to improve the Education, Health, Wellbeing and happiness of people, no matter who they are

### OUR VALUES

Agile  
Innovative  
Collaborative  
Excellence  
Integrity  
Passionate



# KEEPING KIDS IN EDUCATION

The Foundation has been pivotal in keeping young people engaged in education, helping them stay motivated and realise their potential.

Our early intervention programmes continue to positively impact young people, offering them the tools and opportunities to thrive, no matter the challenges they face.

SEND support, primary school interventions, and engagement with young offenders demonstrate our holistic approach to empowering individuals and fostering resilience.

Over 900 people who we have worked with have improved self-awareness after completing our programmes, with 70% improving in confidence.

Designed to support those at risk of exclusion or disengagement, our programmes equip participants with practical skills and a positive outlook, enabling them to re-engage with education or transition successfully into employment.

With over 16,000 young people making safer and healthier choices, these programmes and our mentoring support have become a lifeline for many, proving that with the right help, every young person can achieve their potential.



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Events like World Book Day at the Beacon of Light inspired almost 100 pupils, with Black Cats duo Dan Ballard and Pierre Ekwah encouraging a love for reading while sharing their own experiences of personal growth through education.



# SAVED FROM THE EDGE: KODY FIGHTING FOR A FUTURE

**Fourteen-year-old Kody Wardle Burns' life has taken a remarkable turn, thanks to the You Only Live Once (YOLO) programme—a lifeline for young people like him who are at risk of falling into the cycle of violence.**

Kody's journey wasn't an easy one. After a troubling incident involving a knife, he found himself disconnected from school and struggling to engage with his community. Feeling lost and uncertain, he had no clear path forward.

But everything began to change when he joined the YOLO programme, a free 20-week initiative designed to support young people aged 10 to 16 who are at risk of involvement in serious violence.

From the outset, the sessions offered Kody a fresh perspective. The programme's immersive activities left a lasting impact on Kody, particularly the virtual reality knife crime session.

"It was a real eye-opener," he says. "Seeing the consequences up close made me realise how serious it can get."

The sessions also provided something Kody had been missing—a safe space. Within this supportive environment, he was able to share his feelings and experiences openly with tutors and peers.

For the first time in a long while, Kody felt truly heard and understood. His transformation has been nothing short of inspiring.

Since joining YOLO, Kody has re-enrolled in full-time education, embraced extracurricular activities like trampoline sessions, and set his sights on becoming a bricklayer.

Beyond academics, he's more engaged in his community, bringing a newfound sense of purpose to his daily life. The change hasn't gone unnoticed at home. Kody's mother beams with pride as she talks about the difference she's seen.

"He's so much more confident now," she shares. "He's focused on staying on the right path and building a future he can be proud of." "He's no longer defined by his past but driven by the possibilities ahead. "It's about staying on track," he says, "and focusing on what I really want to do."



**In 2024 there were around 50,500 offences involving a sharp instrument in England and Wales**

Stat from ukparliament

# BUILDING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

We have continued to equip individuals with the skills, confidence, and opportunities needed to pursue their goals in education and employment.

Through employability programmes, we have empowered individuals with the skills and confidence needed to gain employment. In 2024 alone, we upskilled nearly 1,500 young people and adults; supported over 600 participants in their employment journey, and helped secure nearly 100 jobs.

Over the past year, the Foundation of Light has made significant strides in supporting individuals not in education, employment, or training (NEET) and enhanced family learning opportunities.

Through a renewed partnership with the Harrison Centre for Social Mobility, the Foundation provided tuition and training to unemployed youths and recent school leavers, focusing on building confidence, acquiring qualifications, and developing essential skills for employment.

Over 750 sessions have been delivered, with many participants progressing to further education or securing jobs.

Additionally, our adult and family learning sessions have improved employability and personal skills in over 1,800 learners.



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The Foundation's collaborations with local councils, universities, and community organisations have ensured the delivery of transformative programmes. New partnerships with Sunderland and Durham Universities, Croda and Roseline Foundations, have opened doors to innovative projects and mentoring opportunities.



# LAILA'S LEAP: FROM SHY TEEN TO COMMUNITY LEADER

**Seventeen-year-old Laila Johnson has turned her quiet beginnings into an inspiring story of growth and service through the Foundation of Light's Premier League Kicks youth recreation programme.**

Over the course of 1,000 hours at Delves Lane Village Hall, Laila has evolved from a shy participant to a dedicated volunteer, earning her a place at university.

When Laila first joined the free Kicks sessions, she was reserved and reluctant to engage. But everything changed when the programme introduced dance and drama. Encouraged to step outside her comfort zone, she earned a role in a community play—a moment that sparked her confidence.

From there, Laila embraced every opportunity the programme offered: multi-sports, holiday clubs, and even bringing friends and family to join. She began mentoring younger participants, contributing ideas during discussions,

and eventually joined the Junior Youth Forum, where she helped shape activities and organise trips.

Her commitment deepened as she took on a peer mentor role, supporting others during online sessions and then leading in-person activities.

Laila has since volunteered over 55 hours on impactful projects like creating a sensory space, sustainable gardening, and kayaking to clean the River Wear.

This transformative journey has led Laila to pursue her passion academically. Accepted to study Film Studies and Media at York University, she credits Kicks for helping her find her voice and purpose.



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**The estimated percentage of 16–24 year olds  
defined as not in education or training (NEET)  
in 2023 is 41.6%**

Stat from gov.uk



# CREATING SPORTING PATHWAYS

We have reinforced our commitment to nurturing the next generation of sporting talent, creating pathways for youngsters to excel at all levels of competition, while promoting diversity and inclusivity.

The Beacon of Light plays a vital role in engaging thousands of people each week, with over 7,000 individuals joining in weekly sports and community activities through our diverse events calendar - featuring netball, boxing, gymnastics, and wheelchair rugby.

Grassroots clubs, including the Wearside Wildcats, provide accessible sporting opportunities, we are the North East home of England Netball, and through the talent pathway for female football, we welcome an extraordinary 596 girls per week.

The success of our Girls' Development programme was celebrated when nine former participants featured in SAFC Women's League Cup win over Sheffield United, showcasing the tangible impact of our investment in talent development.

A highlight of the year was welcoming former Lioness Jill Scott to our Board of Trustees. As a World Cup winner, and one of the most celebrated figures in women's football, Jill brings a wealth of experience and insight. Her involvement strengthens our efforts to inspire young athletes, promote gender equality as we look to develop sporting talent across the region.



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NATIONAL  
**FUTSAL  
LEAGUE**



NATIONAL  
**FUTSAL  
LEAGUE**



Our Men's Futsal team made headlines, clinching the prestigious National Plate in a thrilling match broadcast live on TNT Sports. These achievements underline the importance of providing young athletes with access to quality coaching, facilities, and opportunities to compete at higher levels.



# RIISING STAR IN WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

## EMILY CASSAP

**At just 17, Emily Cassap has already made waves in women's football. From her early days in Sunderland's youth programmes, it was clear she had a special talent.**

After joining the Foundation of Light's pathway aged nine, Emily progressed to the Regional Talent Club, refining her skills under UEFA-qualified coaches.

Emily's rise has been remarkable. She balanced football with academics, earning top GCSE grades while leading Sunderland RTC to victory in the U16 FA Youth Plate final, where she was named Player of the Match.

Her talent secured a spot in the Sunderland AFC Women's Professional Game Academy, where she now trains with senior players and has scored key goals in competitions like the Conti Cup.

Emily's achievements have also earned her the Association of Colleges' Sport Performer of the Year award.

On the international stage, Emily has represented England at U16 and U17 levels, helping her team reach the European Championship final.

Emily's journey, fuelled by dedication and the support of the Foundation of Light, shows that dreams can be achieved. Sunderland's young star is one to watch.



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# 20

**CURRENT SAFC WOMEN'S ACADEMY  
PLAYERS PROGRESSED THROUGH THE FEMALE  
PATHWAY AT FOUNDATION OF LIGHT**



# STAYING ACTIVE AND CONNECTED

Encouraging active lifestyles and fostering connections remained a priority for the Foundation this year, particularly for those facing physical or social barriers. Over 250 of those aged over-55 access our five day a week programme of activities at the Beacon of Light.

During the summer holidays, over 1,000 parents and children joined in the excitement of our Family Fun Day; activities and entertainment for all ages. Youngsters also had the chance to meet SAFC stars Dan Ballard and Dan Neil as they joined in our summer holiday courses, creating memorable moments and reinforcing the role of sport in bringing people together.

Another landmark initiative this year was the launch of 'Believe,' a ground-breaking mental health support group for women, offering a safe space for participants to share their experiences, develop coping strategies, and connect with others, highlighting the power of community in addressing mental health challenges.

Over 20,000 people who we have worked with have improved their physical health, with 14,000 also improving their mental wellbeing.



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On World Parkinson's Day, the spotlight was on our neurological walking football sessions, where participants with neurological conditions not only stay active but also build strong friendships through shared experiences on the pitch. This programme reflects the Foundation's dedication to using sport as a tool for inclusion and wellbeing – with over 16,000 people who we have worked with feeling that they are much better connected to the community.



# KEVIN'S COMEBACK: ONE STEP AT A TIME

**Parkinson's UK Walking Football participant Kevin Ramsey had his world turned upside down by his diagnosis two years ago.**

The 54-year-old admitted that at the time, the easiest thing to do would be to sit around and let the disease take its toll.

However, Kevin has been fighting back through the Foundation's walking football sessions for those with neurological illnesses.

"Before I came here, I didn't know anybody with Parkinson's Disease, I didn't know anything about neurological diseases," Kevin acknowledged.

"It's not just the fitness, it's the mental side as well. Having other people who are going through the same things I am really helps a lot."

For those with Parkinson's disease, exercise is a vital component to maintaining balance and mobility, allowing them to continue to perform the activities of daily living.

Kevin's love of football was his initial inspiration to joining the sessions, but they have become a stepping stone for so much more. He is now regularly going to the gym, heading out on walks, and socialising.

"Without being able to come here on a Tuesday, I would just sit at home, vegetate, and waste away," he admits.

"You've kind of got to force yourself to do something every day because exercise is great for the mind and the body.

"After the session, just to sit down and talk to each other, find out what we're all up to over a cup of tea and a biscuit, that's just as important to me as the fitness and playing football.

"It's the simple things that sometimes really help."



**Around 153,000 people in the UK are living with Parkinson's. It is the fastest growing neurological condition in the world**

Stat from [parkinson.org](https://parkinson.org)



# COME TOGETHER WITH...



SCAN THE QR CODE FOR  
OTHER WAYS TO SUPPORT



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## TOGETHER AS ONE:

The Wear One campaign is a call for Sunderland to pull together as one, offering support to those in need and fostering an inclusive community.

## RAISING AWARENESS

1 in 3 children in Sunderland is living in poverty. This stark statistic underscores the urgent need for community support and action.

## A HAND UP, NOT A HANDOUT:

Empowering people to improve their lives. The Wear One campaign focuses on giving individuals the tools and opportunities they need to gain employment and enhance their quality of life.

## HOW YOUR MONEY CAN HELP

**£3**

would give someone access to our healthy lifestyle fitness programme

**£5**

would teach a person how to cook healthy meals on a budget

**£10**

would pay for an older couple to attend activities to improve physical and mental wellbeing

**£20**

would teach a family how to cook healthy meals on a budget



YOU CAN ALSO DONATE TO SUPPORT THE  
FOUNDATION'S LIFE-CHANGING WORK BY TEXTING...

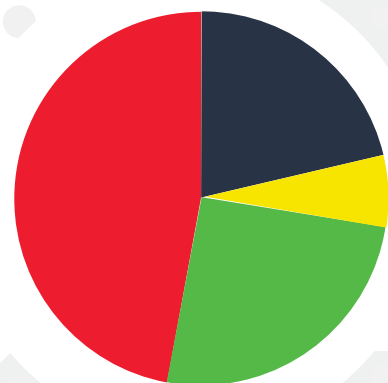
**FOLFIVE** TO **70085** TO DONATE £5 OR VIA **JUSTGIVING**  
AT **JUSTGIVING.COM/SAFC**



# FINANCE

Our financial performance reflects a successful year demonstrating growth in both charitable and trading activities, the Group reported a trading EBITDA of £195,055 for the year.

The Group's net assets are £16,599,848 in 2024 of which unrestricted reserves are £323,350 and the Charity reserve funds are £1,226,235 in 2024, of which £1,202,722 is unrestricted, compared to £1,055,120 in 2024 thereby retaining a position ahead of the £750,000 unrestricted policy that we adopted for the charity.



## Income from Charitable Activities

- Football Coaching
- Services as part of the Direct Charitable Activities
- Government or Public Authorities Contracts
- Performance Related Grants



## Expenditure by Charitable Activity

- Sport and Play
- World of Work
- Education
- Community
- Health
- Beacon of Light
- Core



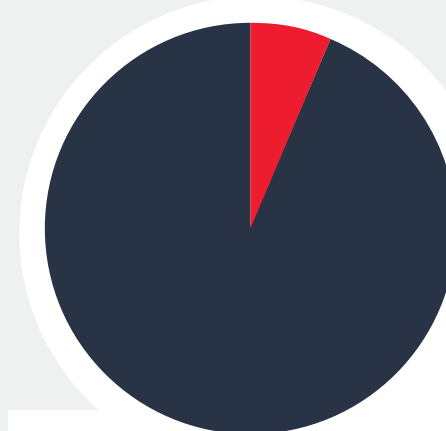
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## Total Group Income

- Charitable Activities
- Other Trading Activities
- Investments
- Donations and Legacies



## Total Charitable Expenditure

- Raising Funds
- Charitable Activities



# BEACON OF LIGHT

When the Beacon of Light opened its doors in 2018, the vision was always that it would be a safe, inclusive, hub for everyone, bringing Foundation of Light programmes to life and providing much-needed unrestricted income to support the charity's outreach work.

The venue now plays a vital role in engaging thousands of people each week fostering inclusivity and learning for all ages:

- Weekly football of 7,000 individuals engaging in weekly sports and community activities
- Offers a diverse events calendar featuring netball, boxing, gymnastics, and wheelchair rugby.
- Free family fun days welcoming over 10,000 people
- Over 90% of participants would recommend us to a friend
- 98% of people have a positive perception of the facility over 10,000 people



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We have on-site collaborations with Siblings Nursery, Wearside Women in Need, the Beacon of Light School, MPCT and Andy's Man Club. In partnership with SAFC we have delivered 90 matchday Fan Zones and in 2024 we opened Yard Nine, our very own community café.



# A WORD FROM OUR CEO

I am incredibly proud of how we've adapted to meet the evolving challenges faced by our region, ensuring that our work remains impactful and relevant.

Our mission is not only to respond to immediate needs but also to create lasting opportunities. Whether it's equipping individuals with new skills, inspiring young people to discover their potential, or offering support to those in vulnerable situations, our focus has always been on making a tangible difference. But this doesn't happen in isolation - it takes innovation, passion, and collaboration.

The strength of the Foundation lies in its ability to bring people together. Our programmes don't just provide solutions; they build connection, confidence, and resilience. Every person who walks through our doors, whether at the Beacon of Light or outreach in the communities of Sunderland, South Tyneside and County Durham, starts a bigger journey. We are deeply committed to maintaining inclusivity, ensuring that our work reaches and empowers diverse communities - including BAME (4%), female (30%), disabled (7%), and LGBTQ+ (1%) participants. By supporting both mental and physical well-being, we are helping people of all backgrounds to thrive.

None of this would be possible without the generosity of our donors and supporters, whose dedication has helped raise an incredible £5 million this year alone. This vital support enables us to continue delivering life-changing programmes that empower young people, strengthen communities, and create opportunities for all.

Looking ahead, our goal is to build on these foundations. By continuing to innovate, grow, and listen to the needs of those we serve, we can ensure that the Foundation remains a beacon of hope for Sunderland and beyond.

**Lesley Spuhler**  
CEO Foundation of Light



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# THANK YOU

## PARTNERS

Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust  
Arriva  
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Caterpillar UK Limited  
Croda Foundation  
County Durham Community Foundation  
Durham County Council  
Durham University  
Education Partnership North East  
EFL Trust  
Gentoo  
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Northumbria Police & Crime Commissioner  
Premier League Charitable Fund  
Roseline Foundation  
Sir Tom Cowie Charitable Trust  
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Springboard  
SAFC  
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MGL  
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MPCT  
Moving on Tyne & Wear  
Molson Coors  
My Civil Solutions  
NE Activity Alliance  
Newcastle International Airport  
Newcastle University  
Nissan  
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Paragon Group  
Parkinsons UK  
PBL Print  
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Public Health  
Red and White Army Trust  
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Robertson Homes

Ron Turnbull  
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Sunderland Branch Liaison Committee  
Sunderland CCG  
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The FA  
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Troo  
Together for Children  
TOX247  
Twin Group  
Utilink  
Vertu Motors  
Ward Hadaway  
Washington Mind  
WTW

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