



Give



Get



Grow



Impact Report 2024 - 25

A Movement on the Move

John Lehal,
Chair, Bedford Giving

Being Chair of Bedford Giving brings together my passions of empowering young people to be the best version of themselves; effecting meaningful change through innovative approaches; and celebrating all things Bedford. Over the last year, I've seen first-hand what makes this initiative so powerful: the people. The energy, the collaboration, the drive to do better by Bedford's children and young people — it's been inspiring and energising.

Bedford Giving isn't just another funding body or project. It's a movement, rooted in the voices of local families' young people and powered by shared purpose. Over the past year, we've backed a growing range of programmes that are already making a difference; from life-changing mentoring schemes and real-world workplace tasters, to creating welcoming spaces where young people feel safe, seen, and supported.

We've also started to show what it looks like when a community comes together — charities, schools, funders, local businesses, and volunteers — all driving in the same direction. That's not easy. But Bedford Giving has shown that with the right model, and a shared belief in better outcomes, it is possible. We are grateful to everyone who has played their part in our journey this year.

As Chair, I've been proud to support this work and help shape what comes next. There's more to do, of course, but I'm more convinced than ever: Bedford Giving is not just delivering results — it's building a long-term legacy. One where every child in Bedford Borough gets the chance to thrive.

Let's keep moving forward.



Contents

3	Empowering Young People to Shape the Future
4	Our Research
5	Top-line Impact
6	Aspirations and Opportunities
8	Mental Health and Wellbeing
10	Youth Voices & Community Panels
12	Activities and Safe Spaces
14	Spreading the word
15	Our Partners
16	How to get involved

Empowering Young People to Shape the Future

Paul (PK) Kellett, Director, Bedford Giving



"To build an effective community, everyone must realise that their community is bigger than them."

Idowu Koyenikan



Change is most powerful when young people lead it — not when it's done on their behalf. That means making space at the table — proper space — for their ideas, their experiences, and their voices. Because if we're serious about building a better Bedford, we need to start by listening to the people growing up here.

Over the last year, I've seen just how powerful that approach can be. When we give young people the platform and the tools, they show up with energy, insight, and solutions that adults alone wouldn't have thought of. Whether it's shaping mental health support, co-designing activities, or advising where funds should go — they're not just taking part. They're leading.

I agree with John: Bedford Giving is more than a project. It's a movement committed to fairness, connection, and ambition — for all of us. Because when we centre lived experience and build with inclusion from the ground up, we don't just help others, we strengthen the whole.

And the truth is, a stronger Bedford for young people is a stronger Bedford for everyone. Let's keep building it, together.

Our Research

Research is central to Bedford Giving's approach.

We use it to uncover the unmet needs of Bedford's young people, then we develop programmes to address those needs. That's why, since 2021, we've run eight research projects, talking to:



888
Bedfordians
(544 young people and 344 adults)



15
charities



6
local schools



4
local or national government bodies

This year, our research activities have included:

Mental Health

We talked to 11 organisations and 26 young people about mental health

We learnt young people in Bedford are struggling to get help with non-urgent mental health challenges

In response we launched two mental health programmes. Our Pink Link website helps parents to provide mental health support to their teenagers at home and our Safe Space in a Youth Place training helps adults to support young people through their volunteering or work

Free time activities

We talked to 152 young people about their free time activities

We learnt there are several "cold spots" around Bedford – Wixams, Great Denham, Shortstown – where very few activities are on offer

In response we set up youth and pop-up activities to give young people things to do in those places

Bedford Borough Council's Family Hub

We talked to 118 young people to find out what they want to see at Bedford Borough Council's new town centre Family Hub

We learnt young people want to use the centre as a place to hang out with friends and take part in simple, structured activities

In response we sponsored a month of relaxed drop-in arts and crafts activities that ran throughout the summer holidays

Life Skills

We talked to a wide range of charities, schools, government bodies, and young people about the life skills they feel they are lacking

We learnt young people are aware of the life skills they lack, but they don't know where to get help. They want practical, hands-on life skills training to support them as they reach different life stages

In response we have started working on a life skills programme that will launch over the coming year

Top-line Impact

Look who benefitted!



90 students at 5 schools participated in our Career Mentoring programme



150 students developed workplace skills and learned about job roles through Taste of the Workplace



More than 100 attended our free activities for young people



More than 2600 people benefitted from projects funded through our community panels



Over 200 adults have followed The Pink Link to our mental health directory and library of support articles about helping young people with mental health concerns, with more set to visit the website as we step up our ad campaign



Plus at least 1000 more young people are expected to benefit from programmes funded via our recently completed youth panel



We couldn't have done it without you

Bedford Giving isn't an ordinary charity. It's a movement that brings together Bedford's entire community to benefit our borough.

This year almost **200 volunteers** contributed to one or more of our projects, giving a total of **1,782 hours** of their time, with an estimated value of **£34,000!** Thank you so much to everyone who got involved.

"Very proud to have run for Bedford Giving at Bedford Running Festival this weekend to raise money to help young people in Bedford Borough"

The business community also came together to help us achieve our goals. **10 different businesses** and organisations contributed to the success of our Taste of the Workplace programme, while our mentoring programme attracted volunteers from **55 employers!**

Aspirations and Opportunities

Aspirations & Opportunities is the first of Bedford Giving's four focus areas.

It's all about helping young people see what's possible and giving them the confidence to go for it.

Over the last year, this has meant running two key projects – **Career Mentoring** and **Taste of the Workplace**.



Career Mentoring

This year, **90 volunteer mentors** stepped up to support students across five Bedford schools:

- 50 Year 10s – Bedford Academy
- 10 Year 10s – Wixams Academy
- 10 Year 10s – Castle Newnham
- 10 Year 10s – Daubeney Academy
- 10 Year 9s – Kempston Academy



Taste of the Workplace

We also brought the world of work into the classroom:

- **Daubeney Academy:** The whole of Year 9 worked on live projects with local employers – from Skanska on construction design, to M&J Roofing & NFRG on pitched roofs, Anglian Water on pipeline planning, and BPHA on housing estate design.
- **Wixams Academy:** Students took part in a powerful joint simulation led by the Bedfordshire Police and The NHS. A staged knife-crime incident showed how emergency services respond, with students learning directly from forensics, detectives, and NHS professionals.

Why It Matters

Opportunities like these spark ambition. They help young people imagine different futures – and believe they belong in them. That's why Aspirations & Opportunities will always be at the heart of what we do.

What we did

Our Career Mentoring programme had a huge impact on mentors and mentees:

91% of mentees  told us that the career mentoring has helped them with school

Among the many skills that mentees felt that they had improved were:



Speaking skills and "aiming high" grew by **20%**



Confidence improved by **25%**



Business acumen grew by **46%**



"I feel more confident. I just loved being able to go into detail and get help with how to go into the working world."

"It is an amazing programme."

The **Taste of the Workplace** had a similar impact.

At Wixams Academy...



100% of students said they found the project beneficial, learned workplace skills, and felt inspired.



48% of students said that they were now interested in a career in the NHS, while **75% said** they were interested in a career with the police.



"We are really thankful to everyone who shared their time and experience with us. What we have learnt will stay with us for life!" (Student)



"The young people were really engaged and asked us lots of interesting questions and we hope that through this project we have inspired some future police officers and staff." (Bedfordshire Police)

89% of mentors reported that they had wholly enjoyed mentoring, telling us it had allowed them to give back to the community, gain personal satisfaction, and develop their skills.



"The mentoring programme is fabulous!"

"Mentoring has opened a lot of doors for me. Over two years of doing this, I've found a real niche and a real passion. The connection that I've made with Bedford Giving has led me into a new role within my organisation – I've wiggled my way into a career in careers."



The schools who hosted the mentors also loved it!



"It's a brilliant programme and it's had such a positive impact on the school!" (Castle Newnham School)



At Daubeney Academy...



100% of students said that they had learned about the skills they needed for the workplace and told us that they had got better at key skills like speaking, teamwork, and confidence.



**We'll help
you navigate
your child's
mental wellbeing**

Make sure you know how to recognise the signs and where to get support.

For expert advice follow:

www.thepink.link



Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mental Health & Wellbeing is the second of Bedford Giving's four focus areas.

It's about making sure young people feel supported, safe, and able to thrive. Over the last year, this has meant running two key projects – Safe Space in a Youth Place and Follow the Pink Link.

Safe Space in a Youth Place

Wherever young people spend time – in schools, youth clubs, football teams, dance groups, or other community spaces – there are trusted adults around them. Safe Space in a Youth Place is about giving those adults the training and confidence to notice when something isn't right, and to step in with the right support.

By equipping teachers, youth workers, volunteers, and coaches with practical tools, we're building a community-wide safety net. Young people can know that wherever they go, there's someone ready to listen and help.

Follow the Pink Link

Finding the right mental health support can feel confusing and overwhelming for families. The Pink Link makes it easier.

We've created a clear, accessible online hub that brings together local services, information, and advice – all in one place. Alongside this, we've launched a campaign to help parents and carers know where to turn when they're worried about a child's mental health.



Why It Matters

Mental health can't wait. By supporting trusted adults across Bedford and giving families clear, reliable information, we're helping young people get the right help, at the right time.

What we did

The first Safe Space in a Youth Place training sessions kicked off in May, and since then we've welcomed 50 participants – teachers, youth workers, sports coaches, and scout leaders.

Participants found the training enormously beneficial, as revealed by the change in the percentage of participants who agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements before and after the training:



"Excellently facilitated, great content, really well done in every aspect."

"Lots of take-aways to use in both my professional and volunteering roles – I'm looking forward to using the techniques."

"If you're a parent, carer or adult who volunteers, works with, or runs a business focusing on youth activities in the Bedford Borough then I'd thoroughly recommend this training."



"I have the knowledge that I need to talk to young people about their mental health" – **rose from 69% to 98%.**

"I feel confident talking to young people about their mental health" – **rose from 71% to 98%.**

"If a young person shared a serious mental health concern with me, I would know who and where to signpost that young person to" – **rose from 47% to 93%.**

"I have the knowledge that I need to create a safe space for young people within my role / organisation" – **rose from 71% to 100%.**

Our Follow the Pink Link campaign has already reached 199 people through our website having just been launched. Each visit represents a positive step towards making Bedford a "Youth Mental Health Friendly" place by providing a family with high-quality, purpose-written advice and guidance. We look forward to growing our audience over the next year!



Youth Voices & Community Panels

Youth Voices & Community Engagement is the third of Bedford Giving's four focus areas.

It's about making sure young people aren't just listened to but heard — with their ideas shaping real change. Over the last year, this has meant putting young people at the centre through our Young Voices Conference and our Community Panels.

We were proud to sponsor the Youth Voice Award as part of the Everyday Hero Awards in 2025, celebrating young people who speak up and drive change. We were thrilled to present the award to Sporting Aid – The Next Generation Podcast a space run by young people, for young people, where they talk about stuff that really matters to young people, from bullying to knife crime. We also highly commended Leo Telford, co-author of Between, raising awareness about trans issues and the Kimberley College Ready2Lead? Group, for their work supporting Year 5 and 6 girls with period education and wellbeing resources.



Young Voices Conference 2024

In autumn 2024, we hosted our first ever Young Voices Conference. Young people from across Bedford came together to share their experiences, talk openly about the challenges they face, and set out their priorities for the future.

It was powerful, honest, and hopeful. What stood out most was the energy and ideas in the room — young people showing just how much they care about their community, and how ready they are to lead change.

Young Voices Conference 2025

Building on that success, this year's Young Voices Conference will go even further. Training and workshops will help young people grow their skills and confidence, while open discussions will focus on the issues they say matter most. This isn't a one-off event — it's the start of an ongoing movement where young people in Bedford have the platform, tools, and support they need to shape decisions and influence the future.

Community Panels — bringing local residents together to turn their lived experience into decision making that shapes their community and addresses the issues that matter most. In the last year we have run two panels: one for parents of children aged 0-5, and another for young people aged 16-18.

Why It Matters

When young people have a voice, the whole community benefits. They bring fresh ideas, lived experience, and a determination to make things better. That's why Youth Voices & Community Engagement will always be at the heart of Bedford Giving.

What we did

Our participatory grant-making panels put Bedford Giving's values into action — handing decision-making power to the community. Each panel is made up of local volunteers who reflect the groups we aim to support. This year, we ran two panels:

Parents of children aged 0-5

Young people aged 16-18

Panel members invited local charities to pitch ideas tackling specific needs, then reviewed the proposals and chose which to fund. It's no easy task: together, the panels received over £600,000 in requests — but had just £170,000 to allocate.

Our Parent Panel: Funding What Families Need

Ten brilliant local organisations were funded through our Parent Panel this year — and their projects are already making waves, reaching 1,309 people so far. Here are just a few highlights:

FACES ran peer-led Spectrum Support sessions, helping parents of autistic children build stronger networks, feel less isolated, and become confident advocates.

"The group is fantastic — I truly can't thank them enough for their understanding, answering my questions, and just being there to listen."

ACL Collective brought high quality arts activities to 131 children and adults at The Easter Bunny's Party, featuring puppetry, storytelling, and immersive theatre.

"Everything was so well organised and the staff were so friendly and welcoming!"

St Mark's Church Preschool built a brand-new outdoor play area, giving children in Brickhill and Putnoe a safe, all-weather space to play and learn.

Bedford Mencap delivered a vibrant Summer Playscheme for 130 children with special educational needs, packed with music workshops, forest school adventures, and festival favourites like bouncy castles and a coconut shy.

Our Youth Panel: Young Voices, Big Decisions

Run in partnership with Bedford College, our Youth Panel handed the reins to young people aged 16-18 — and they rose to the challenge. The panel chose to fund six projects focused on improving access to mental health and wellbeing, whether through free-time activities like boxing and multi-sport clubs, or by offering training and drop-in support.

We're excited to report on the impact of these projects next year.

It's not just the funded organisations or service users who gain from our panels. Bedford Giving panelists themselves describe the experience as life-changing:

"When I started the Bedford Giving panel I felt really isolated as a SEND parent, like my journey was on my own. But being part of the panel gave me the confidence to fight for my child and say 'You know what? My child deserves equal opportunities.'"

Activities and Safe Spaces

Activities & Safe Spaces is the last of Bedford Giving's four focus areas

It's about making sure young people in Bedford have safe, affordable places to go, things to do, and people they can trust. Over the last year, this has meant supporting local youth provision in five neighbourhoods and investing in new town centre youth work.



F4YP Youth Clubs

We've partnered with Fun for Young People (F4YP) to strengthen youth activities in five under resourced locations. These clubs are more than just places to hang out — they're spaces where young people can feel safe, connect with friends, and take part in positive activities. By building up the skills and capacity of volunteers, we're helping to secure the future of these clubs so they can serve their communities for years to come. If your business would like to support one of these locations for 12 months with a £5,000 donation, get in touch.



Town Centre Youth Work

Young people told us they want a central space in the town centre where they can meet, feel welcome, and get support. We've teamed up with One YMCA and Bedford Borough Council's Family Hubs to make that happen. Together, we're creating new opportunities for young people right in the heart of Bedford — a visible, accessible hub of activities, advice, and support.

Why It Matters

Having safe spaces and affordable activities is key to young people's wellbeing. It keeps them connected, gives them a sense of belonging, and helps them grow in confidence. That's why Activities & Safe Spaces will always be a priority for Bedford Giving.

What we did

Wixams in Focus: Bringing Activities to Where They're Needed Most

Our research into Bedford's "cold spots" — areas with few opportunities for young people — flagged Wixams as a priority - so we took action.

First, in April we ran a pop-up skatepark, giving more than 50 young people the chance to try out skating and BMX skills - all for free.

My 12-year-old son visited the skatepark with his friends. He said they all really enjoyed it and it was well run. It was great that scooters and helmets were provided and also they could use their own. Thank you for arranging this for the young people of Wixams."

Then, over the summer, we teamed up with Bedford Blues Foundation and other partners to deliver a four-week programme of activities for young people aged 5-16. Highlights included:

- Introducing primary-aged children to cricket with **Cricket East**
- Football skills with **Luton Town Community Trust**
- Encouraging self-expression through graffiti art and music workshops, from **Educreate**
- Boxing for fitness and discipline with **Samson's Academy**
- Freerunning techniques — jumps, flips, aerials — taught by **Spiral Freerun**

In total, **251 children and young people** took part - including 16 with special educational needs. Some accessed every single session.

"This was the funnest club I have ever been to, all the staff were really nice."

"Both of my children came along to the sessions this holiday and had a great time. Huge thank you to everyone involved."

.....

"It was really good to have somewhere to go to and enjoy the activities in the long summer holidays. Thank you for organising it."



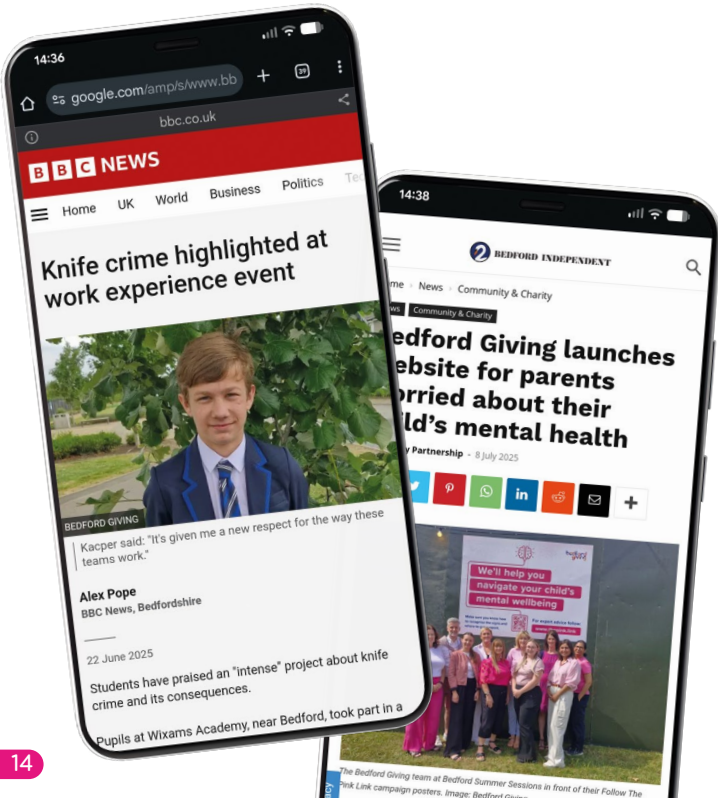
Creative Spark in Bedford Town Centre

Also over the summer, we teamed up with Bedford Borough Council and local art group Permission2 to run a series of hands-on art workshops for young people aged 11-16. Across four sessions, **63 participants** explored a range of creative skills — from making keyrings and bracelets to painting, clay work, and printmaking.

"I enjoyed last week so much I bought my friend with me this this week."

Spreading the Word

We have been spreading the word far and wide, across social media and in the news, showcasing how we're helping to create brighter futures for young people across the borough.



Here's how far our message has reached:



Nearly 10,000 visits to our website



Over 150,000 views of our social media posts



More than 5,000 interactions (likes, comments, shares)



5,000+ visits to our social media pages



14,000+ followers across platforms, growing by 50 new followers each month

One standout success was our **Taste of the Workplace** programme. After being shared by our partners, one video alone by Bedfordshire Police reached **over 2 million views** and received **more than 8,000 likes**—reflecting the programme's innovation and meaningful impact.

We've also made headlines—featuring **over 75 times** in local and national media, on the radio, and including a story on the **BBC News website**. Every single media mention has been **100% positive**.

And we're building deeper connections too. Since launching our newsletter in October 2024, we've published four editions, reaching an average of **250 engaged readers** each time.

Our Partners

Bedford Giving was set up by eight founding partners with strong roots to Bedford, who joined forces to combine their resources, skills, expertise and passion to make a difference to young lives. They are:



LOUSADA PLC

St John's Hospital Trust



GALE FAMILY CHARITY TRUST



The Panacea Charitable Trust



The Worshipful Company of Founders



We are now building a movement and this year brought onboard:



Coalition Partner - Bedford College Group



Corporate Partner – Bedford Specialist Orthodontist Practice (BSOP)

We would like to thank:



The Office Of The Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire for funding our summer activities in Wixams and Bedford Town Centre.



Bedford Borough Council's Family Hubs for funding a youth worker to oversee youth programmes that we're running at the town centre hub, as well as for providing a venue for summer activities.

All the dedicated runners at the Bedford Running Festival who supported us in our community fundraising events.

As well as all the fantastic organisations which partnered with us to run the Taste of the Workplace projects:

Anglian Water, BLMK Health and Care Academy hosted by Bedfordshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Bedfordshire Police, bpha, East of England Ambulance Service, NRFC in partnership with M&J Group Construction and Roofing, and Skanska UK.

And the **55 companies** who provided staff for our mentoring programme.

How to get involved

Join us in shaping a brighter future for the children and young people of Bedford Borough.

At Bedford Giving, we believe that everyone has a role to play in empowering our youth to become all they can be.

Our message is clear: Give, Get, Grow. We believe that everyone in our community has something valuable to contribute, and we invite you to play your part:



GIVE your time, skills, or financial support – every contribution counts. Whether it's volunteering at events, sharing your expertise and knowledge, or making a donation, your involvement helps fuel our collective efforts.



GET involved as an advocate for Bedford's children and young people. Speak up and raise awareness of the challenges they face, and champion the solutions that will help them thrive. Together, we can amplify their voices and drive positive change.



GROW with us as we work towards our shared goal of empowering young people. Stand alongside us in our mission to create opportunities for growth and success. The more people who join us, the greater the momentum we can build.

I AM Bedford Giving.

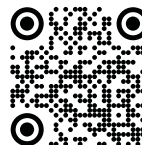
Together, we can make a difference.

Together, we are Bedford Giving.

Our Socials:



www.bedfordgiving.org.uk



Bedford Giving is a local collaboration for children and young people hosted by The Harpur Trust. All funds go directly towards delivering programmes to help young people, and not to running costs.

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