

The **Connolly**
Foundation

IMPACT STATEMENT 2025

Meeting the changing
needs of young and older
people in Bedfordshire

INTRODUCTION

The Connolly Foundation awards grants in two specific areas:

- Education
- Support for older people



The Foundation supports established local partners to deliver services.

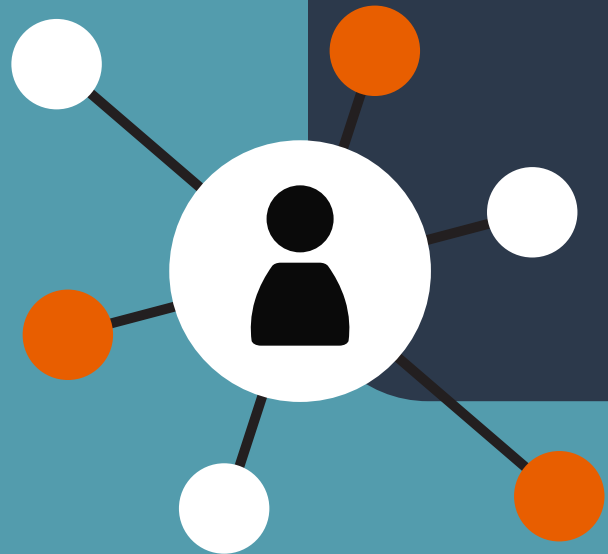
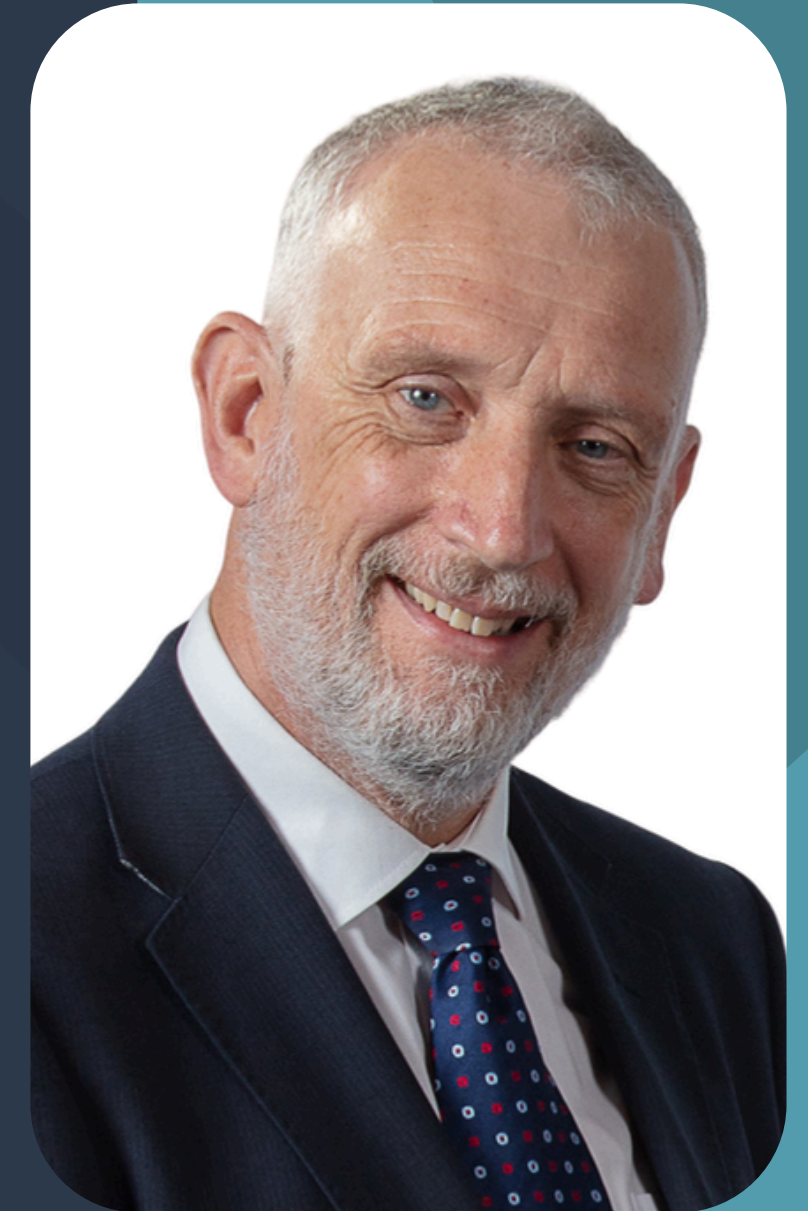


This enables the charity to operate efficiently as it has few direct costs.



“Welcome to our Impact statement for 2025. In this year’s statement, we have looked back at the donations we made in the year to 31 May 2023 and reported the changes that our giving has made. In the year of the coronation of a new King we looked for new initiatives where we could make life better for the people of Bedfordshire.”

David Oldham Chief Executive



✦ GRADUATE TUTORS

In 2020/21 we started funding recent graduates who are being employed by Redborne School in Ampthill for two terms to work in schools in Bedfordshire. They work with teachers to support students on an individual or small group basis, particularly focusing on disadvantaged students and catch-up work.

This was intended originally to last through the pandemic but in 2023 we recognised that the need for this work would continue and we invested **£596,000** in the programme during the year, placing **22 graduates in 11 schools.**

In 2024/25 we funded **24** graduates working in **12** different schools. The feedback we have received from schools, pupils and parents has been very positive. On average, **students improved by half a grade on their GCSE** exams compared to predicted grades.

Graduates gain work experience, with about a quarter of all tutors to date changing their career plans and entering teacher training courses.



✦ FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

In 2023 The Foundation decided to open its bursary scheme for Further Education College students to include students at the College of Central Bedfordshire and Barnfield College in Luton.

In the 2021/22 Academic Year The Foundation awarded 55 bursaries to students attending Bedford College. In the 2022/23 Academic Year The Foundation awarded 366 bursaries to students attending Bedford College, The College of Central Bedfordshire and Barnfield College. This increased to **470** bursaries in the 2023/24 Academic Year.



✦ RAISING ASPIRATIONS

Since 2022 we have supported this programme which supports A-level students to make ambitious choices for higher education, apply and succeed in gaining entrance.



**With the help of
the Connolly
Foundation**

- The success rate in applying to Russell Group Universities has increased from **40% to 56%**

- The success rate in applying for Degree Apprenticeships has increased from **42% to 70%**

- The number of schools participating in the programme has increased from **12 to 14**

✦ UNIVERSITY BURSARIES

We offer those who achieve the highest A-level grades a bursary of between **£500 and £1,000** to help them in their first year at university, followed by **£500** bursaries in each subsequent year of their first degree.

We have been doing this since 2016, and to date have supported **2,150 students**.

In November 2024, we awarded bursaries to **775 students**, paying out a total of **£477,250**.

Starting with a handful of schools, we now offer our bursaries to all A-level students attending state institutions in Bedfordshire.



SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

WEATHERFIELD ACADEMY AND OAKBANK SCHOOL SPECIAL PROJECT

The Connolly Foundation has committed £500,000 over five years to support the development of a multidisciplinary team dedicated to providing tailored support for young people with diverse needs. We are now eager to share the success of this work in order to encourage its wider adoption.

“The Connolly Foundation's generous support has facilitated a unique collaboration between two Single Academy Special Schools, focusing on the development of a Multi-disciplinary approach to Special Educational Needs & Disabilities.”



“We provide direct and indirect clinical work across both sites for children and families including staff drop-ins and whole school training and weekly supervision for the well-being teams.

Assessments and reports for pupils. Training delivered for intervention coordinator and SENCO team.

“In 2023 the team sponsored by The Connolly Foundation had 116 referrals and supported more than 140 young people with Special Educational Needs attending mainstream schools through the outreach programme.”

**What the
Connolly
Foundation has
contributed**



- Employment of specialist staff, including clinical psychologists and a specialist SEND advisor.
- Additional professional provision to enhance skills and well-being.
- Identification and addressing of specific therapy needs.
- Capacity , training and skills building for staff teams.
- Support and training provided to other schools in Central Bedfordshire.
- Outreach support to Central Bedfordshire and Luton schools.
- Consultation surgeries with NHS Speech and Language Service.

★ BEDFORD GIVING

The Foundation has given £300,000 to the Bedford Giving project over the past three years. The project is a joint venture between charities and local businesses aiming to improve the chances of young people in Bedford Borough.

IN THE PAST YEAR THE PROJECT HAS:

- Expanded mental health resources and youth engagement

- Raised an additional **£130,000+** in cash and gifts-in-kind

- Supported **15** charities through community-led grants



- Launched innovative programmes like Taste of the Workplace and Youth Activity Hub

- Generated **150,000** social media impressions

- Mobilised **142** volunteers, contributing more than **1,700** hours

- Delivered support to **1,861** young people and families

✦ BEDFORDSHIRE CAREERS HUB

Since its launch in March 2023, the Bedford Careers Hub has become a vital link between education and industry, supporting **150 schools and colleges** across Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes, North Northamptonshire, and West Northamptonshire. Their mission is to prepare young people for their futures, promote inclusion and social mobility, and ensure that every student has access to meaningful careers guidance and opportunities.

OUR IMPACT SO FAR:

A strong network of 38 Industry Partners and 559 Industry Champions providing employer encounters and workplace insights.

Progress against the Gatsby Benchmarks remains steady (average 5.9), with targeted work underway to strengthen areas such as workplace experiences and higher education encounters

Career Leader Development: 43 staff trained in the last three years, with 74% of schools now having a qualified Careers Leader.

Innovative projects, including new models of work experience and toolkits for schools and employers, are creating sustainable ways to connect young people with industry

Full coverage in Bedfordshire, supporting 73 schools and colleges and over 56,000 students.

“This progress has only been possible thanks to strong partnerships and the generosity of funders. In particular, The Connolly Foundation’s donation has been instrumental in driving their mission forward, enabling the Hub to expand its reach and deepen its impact across the region.”



Looking ahead, the South Midlands Careers Hub remains committed to working with schools, colleges, employers, and partners to give every young person the best possible start to their career journey.

✦ KEECH HOSPICE / BARNFIELD COLLEGE



For more than 25 years, Smiley Sam has brought festive joy to the streets of Luton, raising vital funds for Keech Hospice Care. In 2023, it was time for a new chapter. Thanks to a unique partnership between Barnfield College, The Connolly Foundation, and Keech Hospice Care, Smiley Sam Jnr was brought to life



STUDENT LEARNING AND SKILLS

- More than **600** hours of hands-on work were completed voluntarily by students across Carpentry, Motor Vehicle, and Body & Paint courses.
- The Connolly Foundation donated **£5,859** for parts and materials.
- The project gave students the chance to collaborate on a real-world brief for an external client, developing technical skills, teamwork, problem solving, and independence.
- Students gained pride and experience in contributing to a high-profile community initiative.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

- Smiley Sam Jnr hit the roads on 1st December 2023, touring Luton until Christmas Eve with Santa and volunteers.
- The project helps continue a much-loved local tradition, spreading joy to families and children while raising thousands of pounds for Keech Hospice Care each year.
- Local volunteers described Smiley Sam as the “fundraising highlight of the year”, bringing “joy and magic” despite winter weather.

PARTNERSHIP VALUE

- The Connolly Foundation provided essential funding for materials, enabling the rebuild.
- Barnfield College and Keech Hospice Care strengthened their collaboration, showing how education, philanthropy, and community organisations can work together for lasting impact.



✦ **BEDFORD BLUES FOUNDATION**

In May 2022 The Connolly Foundation pledged £17,500 to the Bedford Blues Foundation to equip their Hub based at the Bedford Blues rugby ground.

The Connolly Foundation has continued to support the Bedford Blues Foundation since then, and has supported programmes which work with young people who are disengaged from mainstream education and aim to improve confidence, self-esteem, resilience, life skills and well-being.

During the 2024-25 academic year the programmes supported 181 young people, each programme offering 30 x 3 hours weekly sessions.

Regular student surveys showed that students improved their resilience, communication and leadership skills.



✦ CHALLNEY HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

The Connolly Foundation is delighted to have contributed to the ongoing development of Year 9 and Year 10 Engineering students at Challney High School for Girls. They have designed and produced a decision-making dice using 3D printing technology and learned to use Onshape, a free 3D design software, to model their own products before manufacturing them in school.

Impact

- Originally planned for a smaller group, the project's success led to every Year 9 student taking part. The enthusiasm and achievement of the pupils have directly inspired more girls to pursue Engineering at GCSE – resulting in two full classes in the next year for the first time.

Next Steps

- To meet this growing demand, the Foundation pledged a further grant to convert a textiles room into a multi-material engineering space to expand practical opportunities and skill development.

This project has had a clear and lasting impact – increasing engagement, building technical confidence, and encouraging more young women to see engineering as an exciting and achievable pathway



✦ THE SHUTTLEWORTH TRUST

The Shuttleworth Trust maintains historic aircraft and holds regular air shows when the planes are flown for the benefit of the public.

The Connolly Foundation awarded bursaries to five employees of the Shuttleworth Trust who are learning to maintain the planes or run the air shows.



✦ FRIENDS FOR LIFE

Friends for Life aims to reduce loneliness and social isolation among care home residents in Bedford Borough through one-to-one befriending and meaningful activities.

OVER THE PAST YEAR WITH THE HELP OF THE CONNOLLY FOUNDATION

A second volunteer coordinator was appointed to strengthen training, supervision, and volunteer retention.

103 residents in 32 care homes were supported through our befriending programme.

The Activities Programme also grew significantly. Led by a new Activities Lead, Friends For Life partnered with local schools and colleges including Bedford College, Bedford School, Biddenham School, and Great Denham Primary.

491 pupils took part in 22 intergenerational partnerships, bringing joy and connection to 461 residents.

34 new volunteers were recruited, DBS-checked, and trained.

Our work was even highlighted in Biddenham Upper School's Ofsted Report, which commended the project for developing pupils' sense of moral responsibility.

✦ HEALTH PROMOTION



In 2023, the Connolly Foundation donated £6,000 each to three local housing associations to run health and exercise classes in their old people's homes.

The project was run in partnership with Bedford Borough Council's health promotion team.

Over the year about 24 sessions were delivered every month across eight different venues drawing about 175 attendances per month at local sessions.



