NHS
Blood and Transplant

NHSBT Community Grants Programme

2023/24

Investment Round Progress Report

Contents

Foreword

I am delighted to present this report showcasing the role that our Community Grants Programme plays in supporting our objective to grow and diversify our donor base, and to share the outputs of the 2023/24 funding round.

The programme was designed to enable us to form collaborative partnerships with community based organisations that could promote blood and organ donation. We know that there are lots of barriers to overcome to encourage donation within some sections of the population. However, by using their authentic voices in the community, these partners are able to credibly talk to our mission and build awareness and understanding.

Community engagement takes time and there is no one size fits all approach. The partners featured in our case studies demonstrate the pivotal role they play in winning over hearts and minds, with each approaching it very differently, but with all making a demonstrable difference.

Without the support of our community partners we would not achieve the success we have in building credibility for NHSBT and transforming lives. We are committed to continuing to strengthen our relationship with grassroots organisations to reach some of our core audiences. Going forwards, we intend to further build on this approach and ensure that we surface more of the amazing work these partners deliver and use the insight they bring to shape our wider delivery in the community.

Mark Chambers

Director of Donor Experience

Saving and Improving Lives Through Community Partnerships

A collaborative community 'What's Your Blood Type?' event

Why this work matters

Blood and organ donation are vital to saving and improving lives across the UK. Every day, NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) coordinates the supply of blood, organs, tissues, plasma and stem cells to support NHS patients in urgent need. Around 8,000 people are currently waiting for a life-saving transplant, and thousands rely on regular blood transfusions to manage chronic conditions.

Blood donation remains the most common form of donation—but it's not always enough. Rare blood types such as Ro (found in just 2% of the population) or universal types like Oneg are in constant demand. NHSBT needs 12,000 Black heritage blood donors each year—around 250 donations per day—to meet the urgent demand.

Every minute, the NHS needs 3 lifesaving blood donations

Only 1% of people die in circumstances where organ donation is possible

Ensuring that donation reflects the diversity of the population it serves has never been more critical. For many patients, particularly those from Asian, Black, African, and Caribbean communities, finding a matched donor can be the difference between life and death. The rising prevalence of conditions such as Sickle Cell Disease and Thalassaemia, which disproportionately affect Black and Asian communities, mean that the need for ethnically matched blood donors is growing rapidly.

Since the introduction of the opt-out system in 2020 for organ donation, it has also become even more important to raise awareness and support people to make informed decisions. People from Asian, Black African and Caribbean backgrounds are more likely to develop health conditions that require a transplant. Yet they are significantly less likely to donate, resulting in long waits and poorer outcomes for patients from these communities.

When donor and patient share ethnicity, the chance of a successful match increases and outcomes improve significantly. Increasing representation in the donor pool is therefore vital to addressing health inequalities.

Sierra Leone Arts & Culture Festival 2023 with Black Blood Matters

The Community Grants Programme: Driving grassroots impact

The Community Grants Programme (CGP) is central to NHSBT's strategy to improve lives by ensuring all patients receive the donations they need to survive and thrive. Established as a key part of NHSBT's long-term strategy to reduce inequalities and improve donation rates, the Community Grants Programme directly funds community-led organisations to raise awareness, build trust, and change behaviour.

In 2023/24, the programme awarded **£683,521 to 50 community partners,** focusing on reaching and empowering under-represented communities, particularly those from Asian, Black African,and Caribbean backgrounds, through a collaborative, community-led model.

These organisations, often led by members of the communities they serve, possess the cultural fluency, relational capital, and local credibility needed to spark authentic dialogue and drive behavioural change. Their ability to convene through shared language, culture, and faith enables them to reach across geographical boundaries and mobilise family, peer, and faith-based networks.

Where systemic mistrust of institutions persists, these community-led groups act as trusted intermediaries, amplifying NHSBT's messages while preserving cultural nuance. In this way, they support informed decision-making and create environments where people feel safe to explore, question, and act.
In shifting perceptions among Asian, Black African and Caribbean communities, it directly contributes to NHSBT's work to change attitudes whilst boosting donor numbers and registrations by:

- **Investing in change and system-wide collaboration**
- **Supporting projects that create reusable digital or printed resources**
- **Supporting online and offline engagement tailored to diverse audiences**
- **Funding creative, arts-based work that reaches audiences in new ways**
- **Amplifying the lived experiences through powerful storytelling**
- **Enhancing donor experiences, such as the new state-of-the-art facility in Brixton**

That's where the Community Grants Programme plays a vital role. It's not just about raising awareness - it's about laying the foundations for behaviour change. Through trusted relationships, culturally relevant communication, and grassroots leadership, CGP partners help move individuals along the entire journey from awareness, to understanding, to conversation, to consideration, to donation.

These early-stage, community-based interventions are often the invisible infrastructure behind successful donor registrations and appointments. Without them, trust may not be built, questions may go unanswered, and potential donors may never take that first step.

It's a vital extension of NHSBT's wider Community Engagement strategy to grow and diversify our donor base through collaborating across strategically targeted localities to build strong community relationships and create bespoke activity plans that drive increased engagement, brand advocacy, registrations, and donations.

And the impact of our combined efforts through marketing and grassroots engagement is clear: more people from Black and Asian backgrounds are registering, donating, and talking about blood and organ donation.

In 2023, blood donations from regular Black heritage donors hit a record high of almost 20,000 with a further 7,426 who gave blood for the first time.

There is also a rise in the proportion of opt-in registrations from ethnic minority groups on the NHS Organ Donor Register (ODR) over the past five years. In 2018/19, just over 7% of people who registered in support of organ donation and declared their ethnicity were from ethnic minorities, a figure that rose to just over 11% in 2023/24.

These are powerful signs that attitudes are shifting. Where mistrust once created barriers, community-led partners are building trust, creating safe spaces for dialogue, and empowering informed choices.

Yet, the need for more donors remains. More Black heritage donors are giving blood than ever before, but demand continues to grow—particularly for rare blood subtypes like Ro, vital for patients with conditions such as sickle cell. Similarly, more organ donors from Asian and Black communities are needed to help improve transplant match rates and save lives.

By embedding work within communities least represented across the donor base—but who stand to benefit most from increased donations—this approach offers a critical upstream intervention. It also provides NHSBT with real-time insights into the lived barriers communities face and the strategies most likely to overcome them.

Through the Community Grants Programme, NHSBT is driving grassroots action and building on the legacy of previous years by deepening engagement with communities.

Community Grants Programme – Funds invested, 2023/24

The donor journey doesn't start in the clinic—it starts in the community. Before someone gives blood, registers as an organ donor, or considers living donation, they must first hear about it, understand it, and feel confident that it aligns with their values. This is especially true for communities who have historically been under-represented or under-served in healthcare conversations.

2023/24

£683,521 in Grants Awarded

Blood	Deceased Organ	Living Kidney	Blood & Deceased Organ	Stem Cell
£242,187 awarded **17** projects funded	**£126,925** awarded **13** projects funded	**£112,500** awarded **7** projects funded	**£99,678** awarded **6** projects funded	**£102,231** awarded **8** projects funded

Community Grants Programme – Impact, 2023/24

Organ donation stand led by Sadhu Vaswani Centre, London

The true impact of this community-led work is measured by its powerful ripple effect. It begins with a single conversation, grows into a local event, and builds into a national movement of awareness and action. These community-led efforts are vital because they create the conditions for change - opening space for trust, understanding, and dialogue around subjects that can take time to explore. Behaviour change doesn't happen instantly, but every informed conversation lays important groundwork. By empowering trusted messengers on the ground, this programme creates the confidence and understanding that ultimately saves lives. It's a powerful reminder of what's possible when communities are placed at the heart of our mission.

11.3 million people reached through online content and public-facing activity - amplifying awareness at scale.

90,545 direct conversations held in community settings - creating space for honest dialogue and informed choices that drive action.

Over 417 community-led events held in the hearts of our communities - building trust, visibility, and connection.

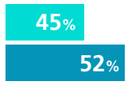
Over 700 community activities — plus **2,592 social media posts** and **10,000 shares** amplifying messaging online.

Over 3,662 blood donation registrations - potentially saving and improving over 10,986 lives.

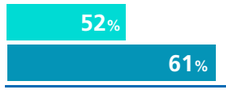
Over 873 opted in to the Organ Donor Register, increasing the number of potential lifesaving organ donors.

The activity that our Community Grants Programme partners delivered helped contribute, alongside other communications activity, to the following shifts we saw within Black heritage and ethnic minority backgrounds during this period:

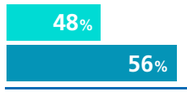
Around half (51%) of people of ethnic heritage in England agreeing they were aware that the NHS needs more black heritage blood donors



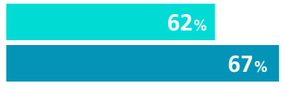
An increase in top-of-mind awareness of publicity or information about blood donation, rising from 45% to 52%



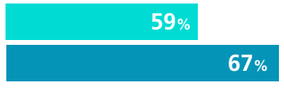
An increase in propensity to give blood from 52% to 61%



An increase in the “sense of urgency” to give blood from 48% to 56%



An increase in support for organ donation from 62% to 67%



An increase in willingness to donate organs after death from 59% to 67% with community being a key driver

Sickle Cell Society at the Pan-African Sports and Cultural Day

Building Blocks for our Successful Community-Led Approach

The following approaches emerged consistently across projects as being critical to building trust, shifting perceptions, and driving behavioural change in communities.

The Importance of Face-to-Face Engagement

Face-to-face engagement has been a cornerstone of effective awareness-raising within NHS Blood and Transplant's community programmes. It provides a uniquely powerful way to foster trust, address misconceptions, and enable open, culturally sensitive conversations about both organ and blood donation.

In-person events create space for meaningful dialogue—where individuals can voice personal concerns, ask questions, and hear lived experiences from recipients and donor families. This human connection resonates more deeply than digital or print campaigns, building lasting trust and emotional investment.

Collaboration with community organisations has also allowed NHSBT to extend its reach, particularly outside London. Since 2021, joint in-person events with trusted local groups have driven consistent increases in awareness, engagement, and donor registrations.

> **"Face-to-face engagement is vital to our outreach work. By working alongside trusted community partners, we can connect directly with potential blood donors, build trust, and dispel myths around donation. Our partnership with the London Fire Brigade is a powerful example, bringing their teams across London together to host regular blood donation sessions."**
>
> *Sarah Babalola, Sickle Cell Society*

Generational Differences

Projects targeting different age groups have shown that tailoring messages by generation can enhance relevance. Older individuals often engage through religious and cultural frameworks, where values like compassion and service are key motivators. By winning their trust, organisations are able to activate whole family networks and communities through intergenerational influence.

> **"Our focus was to engage with older generations… older generations are more religiously inclined and our objective was to win their support and, via them, spread the message through extended families and local communities."**
>
> *Manhar Mehta, Vanik Council*

Community Collaboration

Successful projects have relied on authentic partnerships with trusted leaders. In Luton and Bedford, a collaboration involving the Mayor, a local councillor with lived transplant experience and key faith and student leaders greatly amplified impact. These collaborations provided access to community networks and legitimised the message, resulting in wider engagement and more productive conversations around donation.

> **"Working with respected figures like the Mayor and Councillor enhanced the credibility of our campaign… and helped us reach and inspire a wider audience. By leveraging the networks, trust, and influence of our partners, we gained deeper access to the community**
>
> *Dr Britzer Paul Vincent*

Creating Relevant, Culturally-Rooted Materials

Creating accessible, culturally inclusive assets has proven invaluable. Shade 7's children's book, A Different Kind of Hero, used storytelling to introduce donation concepts in a faith-sensitive and emotionally resonant way.

There has been incredibly touching feedback from children who now think of their own family members as heroes, appreciate the role kidneys play in their bodies, and why it is so important to take care of their health.

Through books and associated classroom resources, they fostered awareness not just in young readers, but across entire households and communities.

> **"A book is uniquely powerful—it reaches children, parents, grandparents… entire households. Storytelling is a powerful tool that creates lasting memories and positive associations. By weaving important messages into engaging narratives, we were able to introduce a topic like organ donation in a way that was approachable, culturally relevant, and faith inclusive. The emotional connection that stories create helps to shift perspectives, encourage discussion, and leave a lasting impact.**
>
> *Hajera Memon, Shade 7*

Involving Clinical Specialists

Clinical specialists, particularly organ donation nurses, bring unique authority to community conversations. Their involvement reassures audiences by addressing sensitive clinical, cultural, and religious concerns with credibility and empathy. Their presence also helps NHS staff build understanding of community-specific barriers and priorities, further refining how services are delivered.

> **"Specialist nurses can answer questions others can't—about surgery, burial, timelines—and they gain cultural awareness in return."**
>
> *Winnie Andango, Lead Nurse for EDI for Organ Donation, NHSBT*

> **"Specialist staff walk the delicate line between supporting grieving families and advocating for donation… Their expertise and compassion are critical."**
>
> *Lucy Dames, Lead Nurse, NHSBT*

Tapping into Faith Moments and Communities

Faith-based engagement remains one of the most effective ways to build trust. RAFFA's church campaigns encouraged open discussion about health and donation within places of worship, supported by the lived experience of donors and recipients. NHSBT staff were invited into these spaces to support conversations with accurate information and resources.

Cells of a Generation Church event

> **Engaging directly with congregants within their places of worship, we use lived experience, faith platforms, and trusted voices to foster discussion, highlight the urgent need for blood donors and increase donor visits.**
>
> *Angela Clarke, RAFFA International Development Agency*

Engaging Young People as Change Agents

Young people are enthusiastic, digital-savvy advocates who bring fresh energy to donation campaigns. Student groups, as part of We Are Donors, have organised fun and less daunting ways to approach organ and blood donation, such as sporting competitions or community driven group donations fostering a culture of giving, unity and change that will resonate for years to come.

Student-led initiatives have proven highly effective at normalising donation, making the conversation approachable and empowering peers to lead change.

We Are Donors student engagement

> **Using their skills in technology, social media, and inclusivity, our student ambassadors don't just commit to saving lives - they inspire their peers and family to do the same..**
>
> *Charlotte Braithwaite-Shirley, We Are Donors*

Using Social Media to Reach Young Adults

Digital platforms have been essential for reaching younger demographics. Social media allowed organisations like Black Blood Matters to monitor trends, tailor content in real time, and spark peer-to-peer conversations about donation. This approach made donation relevant and visible, engaging 18–35-year-olds through culturally resonant, creative content.

> **Social media filled a gap traditional outreach couldn't… It made donation conversations more visible, accessible and shareable.**
>
> *Georgelene Elliott, Black Blood Matters*

Black Blood Matters social content

Focus on Blood Donation

Blood donation is essential to saving lives and supporting the NHS every single day. Every minute, the NHS requires three blood donations to meet clinical demand—providing vital platelets, plasma, and red blood cells for patients in urgent need.

Demand is rising, particularly for ethnically matched blood to treat conditions such as Sickle Cell, Thalassaemia, and other rare blood diseases. These conditions disproportionately affect people from Black African and Caribbean backgrounds and expanding and diversifying the donor pool is a priority for NHS Blood and Transplant to ensure more equitable access to lifesaving treatment for all.

245 babies are born each year with sickle cell

Around **50%** of blood transfusions given to sickle cell patients are not the best possible match.

You are **ten times more likely** to have the Ro subtype critical for sickle cell treatment if you are of Black African or Black Caribbean heritage.

Grants awarded

In 2023/24, **17 projects** focused on blood donation were funded through the Community Grants Programme. These projects, led by organisations rooted in Black African and Caribbean communities, received a combined total of **£242,187.**

Blood

£242,187 awarded

17 projects funded

Case study

Cianna's Smile — Life in Your Blood

Youth-led storytelling that shifts perceptions, opens conversations, and drives new donor action

Cianna's Smile is a youth-led organisation supporting children and families affected by Sickle Cell. Through their NHSBT-funded project, they developed an emotional, multi-generational docudrama to raise awareness of the condition and the critical need for Black heritage blood donors.

What began as an ambitious theatre project evolved into a creative docudrama when logistical challenges required a pivot. The result was a powerful, unscripted film that captured raw, deeply personal stories from young people, parents, and grandparents - offering audiences a window into the day-to-day realities of living with Sickle Cell.

Filming a patient blood transfusion for the Docudrama

What Was Delivered

The project successfully brought together storytelling, creative therapy, education, and youth leadership to drive awareness and behaviour change.

Life in Your Blood : a creative, non-scripted film driven by lived experience - Originally envisioned as a live theatre production, the project shifted toward a docudrama format to overcome challenges around geography and coordination. The film features multi-generational voices - young people living with Sickle Cell, their parents and carers, and even grandparents - sharing honest, emotional reflections on the condition, the importance of blood donation, and their dreams for the future.

The team captured unfiltered perspectives in a relaxed setting, allowing contributors to speak freely. As Hayley King, founder of Cianna's Smile, explained, "It wasn't robotic, it wasn't rehearsed - it was whatever was in the moment. That's what made it connect." Audiences have responded with overwhelming emotion. Screenings at schools, universities, workplaces and community events frequently leave viewers "speechless," according to Hayley, often resulting in donor registrations or volunteers coming forward.

Engagement through premiere events and community screenings - The film has been screened at 25 events to date, from Black History Month celebrations to NHS and local authority events. These screenings consistently sparked strong audience support with one particularly memorable moment during a public screening at a community shopping centre, which led to Cianna's Smile becoming a charity partner at the venue. Several universities' Afro-Caribbean Societies (ACS) also reached out for screenings and talks. The film has prompted not only individual donations and conversations but also led to over 25 new partnerships and collaboration offers.

Institutional uptake: from emotional impact to embedded education - Beyond one-off screenings, the film has become an educational tool within several schools, sixth forms, and universities. After witnessing its impact, educators and youth leaders began integrating it into lesson plans, awareness assemblies, and staff training - embedding it into formal learning environments. "People started asking, 'Can we use this in our school?' or 'We'd love for you to speak to our staff,'" Hayley explained.

This shift marked a key evolution: from awareness to institutional adoption. The film has helped educators open up conversations around race, health inequalities, stigma, and blood donation in ways that feel human and relatable. As a result, Cianna's Smile is now developing plans to continue scaling the model through school networks and regional education partnerships.

Reframing representation: empowering young people and bridging generations - A core aim was to challenge how young people with Sickle Cell are seen - and how they see themselves. Many had never been given center stage, often excluded from school plays due to health concerns. This project changed that. "Most of the young people we support have never been given a main role in a school play, just in case they're not well enough. This was their chance to be the star."

By creating the docudrama, young people shaped their own stories, gaining agency, visibility, and pride. The project demonstrated how arts and creativity can serve as powerful long-term tools for support and healing, as well as community impact.

Older participants found the process just as meaningful. In many communities, health conditions like Sickle Cell remain taboo, rarely discussed outside the home. For parents and grandparents, the opportunity to speak openly with their children and grandchildren - and do so creatively - proved both therapeutic and empowering. This opened a unique space that transformed silence into storytelling and stigma into shared strength.

Donor engagement and behaviour change - The film didn't just raise awareness - it directly influenced donor behaviour. Attendees regularly signed up to donate, shared what they learned with friends and family, or took the message into their workplaces and schools.

However, the team also uncovered barriers**:** many younger donors donated once, but didn't return - suggesting a need for better systems to build donor loyalty. Access issues, such as inconvenient times or lack of transport, also remained hurdles.

Watch Cianna's Smile docudrama: Life in Your Blood

Learning and Legacy

Key insights from Cianna's Smile's experience included:

Flexibility fuels success

The shift from theatre to docudrama wasn't a failure - it unlocked a more accessible and scalable format. "Sometimes you have to pivot, and that's okay. Be honest with funders and keep the end goal in sight."

Prompt with confidence

The team shifted from "soft" engagement to direct, confident calls to action. "We used to ask gently - now we say, 'If you can donate, why haven't you?'"

Make it youth-led

From story development to logistics, the team centred around young people's ideas, voices, and leadership throughout. "They are the future. I want to give them the space to build the future they want to be part of."

Creativity isn't a nice-to-have. It's necessary

The project helped reframe creativity as a vital tool for both personal and community wellbeing. For people living with Sickle Cell, storytelling, theatre, and film offered emotional release, connection, and visibility. At the same time, these creative tools helped engage the wider community - building empathy, breaking down stigma, and sparking action on the urgent need for Black heritage blood donors.

A strong creative output can sustain impact beyond the life of the project

A single and powerfully produced piece of creative content can continue to create opportunities long after funding ends. It became more than a project output - it was a legacy tool. The film opened doors to events, public spaces, and brand partnerships, extending the project's reach, influence and impact well beyond its original scope.

Scalability and future vision

The team is now working to scale the project by:

- Securing wider distribution of the film - through festivals, awards, and educational use
- Producing a sequel focused on children's perspectives and celebration
- Delivering the original theatre production, with families and young people across generations involved

This model can be replicated by other community-led groups working at the intersection of health, creativity, and advocacy.

As Hayley puts it, "Without this funding, none of it would have been possible. There's no other pot that supports this kind of work - and it's so needed." The project shows that with trust, creativity, and lived experience at the centre, storytelling can change minds, open hearts and build a more inclusive culture of donation.

25+ high-impact **events**

Engaged **3,500+ attendees**

Inspired **300+ new donor registrations**

Screenings reached **schools, universities, national conferences,** and more

Focus on
Organ Donation

The decision to donate one's organs after death is a profound and personal act - one that has the power to save or transform the lives of others.

For Leela Keshavji, it was a choice made with the full support of her husband and family. When she sadly passed away at the age of 47 from a brain haemorrhage, Leela's decision enabled five people to receive life-saving transplants. Her legacy lives on through those whose lives she touched.

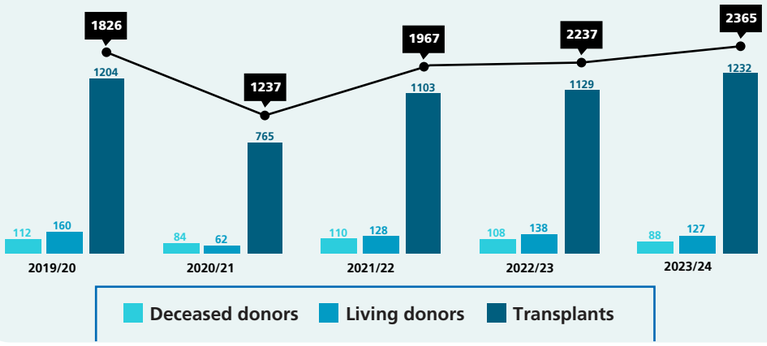
While the UK now operates under an opt-out system organ donation, informed family conversations and culturally sensitive education remain critical—particularly within communities where taboos, mistrust, or lack of information persist. There's a critical need for more organ donors from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic communities to address health disparities in organ transplantation. People from these communities are disproportionately affected by conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure, increasing their likelihood of needing a transplant.

In 2023/24, **1,232 patients** from ethnic minority backgrounds received life-saving organ transplants— a five-year high.

However, the number of deceased donors from ethnic minority backgrounds fell by **19%**, **from 108 in 2022/23 to 88 in 2023/24.**

Organ donation family consent is nearly twice as high among **white families (70%) than ethnic minority families (39%)**

Annual Report on Ethnicity Differences, 2023-24



Transplant list over the last 5 years

- **30%** increase in ethnic minority patients waiting on the list
- **2%** increase in transplants for ethnic minority patients (all organs)
- **21%** fall in ethnic minority living donors
- **21%** fall in ethnic minority deceased organ donors

Grants awarded

In 2023/24, **13 projects focused on deceased organ donation** were awarded a combined total of **£126,925,** with each organisation receiving grants of around **£10,000.**

Deceased Organ

£126,925
awarded
13 projects funded

Case study

University of Bedfordshire -

Student Changemakers

Creating student-led change and community connection through education, creativity, and collaboration

The University of Bedfordshire - who host the **UK Organ Donation & Transplant Research Centre -** delivered a dynamic, student-driven project aiming to normalise conversations around deceased organ donation within ethnically diverse communities. The project built on extensive research by Dr Britzer Paul Vincent, whose PhD explored the barriers and facilitators toward deceased organ donation among the general public and stakeholders in India - particularly the difficulty young people face in initiating conversations around death and donation with their families.

Student-led deceased organ donation awareness raising fair

The project focused on training and empowering students to become confident advocates, equipping them with tools to creatively engage others within their peer groups, communities, and wider local networks.

What Was Delivered

The project delivered a wide-ranging programme of activity both within and beyond the university campus:

Student training and internship programme: Over 50 students were trained as interns, recruited primarily from public health, microbiology, and environmental health courses. They received targeted training on organ donation, legal frameworks, and handling community questions. Many continued their involvement after graduating, helping to onboard new interns and maintain momentum. This student-led structure not only helped sustain the work beyond the funding period but also created a long-term advocacy network rooted in lived experience and peer support.

Interactive awareness events: The team moved away from traditional stalls and lectures by creating engaging discussion opportunities - for example, through games-based engagement with myth-busting messages, ring-toss games linked to donation facts, and other playful, visual materials. These approaches helped break the ice, creating moments of humour and curiosity that made the topic more approachable, especially for students on campus. Events were deliberately informal and creative, often designed to spark "just enough" curiosity to open up a conversation. "We weren't giving people a lecture — we were giving them a moment to pause and think," said Dr Vincent. Students also brought the work into wider university life - setting up stalls at public health conferences, linking activities to cultural days, and curating film screenings (including a Nollywood film on donation produced by another organisation previously funded by the Community Grants Programme) that acted as soft entry points into deeper dialogue. This variety of formats meant the project reached people with different interests and comfort levels, keeping the topic fresh and visible.

Community partnerships : Community partnerships were a critical part of this project's success - spanning local government, faith leaders, health professionals, and grassroots cultural networks. These relationships helped the student-led initiative extend well beyond the university and gain credibility within communities. One standout collaboration was with a local councilor, Fatima Begum - a two-time kidney transplant recipient and a respected figure in Luton's Muslim community. Her support enabled the project to build trust and visibility, leading to greater reach into local faith and cultural spaces.

The "Islam and Organ Donation" event : The 'Islam and Organ Donation' event was student-led and delivered in partnership with community leaders. It was supported by Professor Gurch Randhawa, Director of the UK Organ Donation & Transplant Research Centre, who had also co-authored the book Organ Donation in Islam, and by the Luton Mayor, Councillor Tahmina Saleem, who helped the students design the event. "I wasn't even there," said Dr Vincent. "The students ran it completely on their own with peer support. When I followed up, they told me it led to powerful conversations and questions from the audience. That was really special." By centring around lived experiences and facilitating honest dialogue - rather than pushing fixed answers - the session helped attendees feel heard, not judged. This approach made it easier to dismantle fears and open minds. It also demonstrated the trust the students had built in the community, and the credibility they carried as peers rather than external authorities.

Curriculum integration : The project embedded organ donation into the University's Health Inequalities module, allowing students to explore the topic within a wider public health framework. By aligning the topic with the wider public health curriculum, the project gave students a structured, academic grounding in the subject, while also introducing them to real-world engagement opportunities. The module became a pipeline for recruiting student interns, with each cohort exposed to both classroom learning and the chance to participate directly in community-based advocacy.

The sessions are now delivered by a teaching professor, helping to embed organ donation awareness into the University's long-term academic infrastructure — ensuring it continues as part of mainstream teaching rather than remaining a one-off funded initiative.

Public engagement at scale : The team participated in high-profile community events, such as a Public Health Conference attended by healthcare organisations, local council representatives, and hospice partners. "We only had 10 minutes to present, but it opened so many doors. Afterwards, people queued to speak with us - that's when we built stronger partnerships with local councillors, mosques, and more."

Regional visibility : With support from the council, the project lit up the Luton Town Hall in pink for organ donation awareness - a first for the borough. This highly visible moment attracted attention from across Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes, drawing donor families, recipients, and faith leaders to participate in a wider community celebration and dialogue.

ITV coverage of work and student-led organ donation awareness events

Learning and Legacy

Several key learnings emerged from the project:

Don't go it alone

"If you want a project to go far, don't do it by yourself," said Dr Vincent. "Collaboration fuels creativity, and it keeps things going when individuals move on."

Visibility matters

Repetition is key. "One event doesn't change much," Dr Vincent reflected. "But when people see you at different places - events, lectures, social media - eventually they engage."

Leverage trusted voices

Engaging community leaders or influencers helps amplify the message more authentically.

Make it student-owned

By trusting students with real leadership, the project not only gained fresh ideas but created a long-term advocacy pipeline that lives beyond the funding period.

Go where people already are

The team found it difficult to attract people to stand-alone organ donation events. They had far more success by joining existing community events, leveraging footfall and familiarity.

Tailor engagement and embed it consistently

The project's success came from targeting diverse audiences with formats ranging from serious lectures to casual film screenings, repeatedly engaging communities, and integrating learnings across activities.

Scalability and future vision

Dr Vincent believes the model can be replicated in Universities across the UK. “This doesn’t require huge infrastructure. Our University has a mission for career-powered education, and this project provides public health students with invaluable work experience placements. All we’ve done is offer them a meaningful topic - organ donation - and a space to be creative.”

Institutions with existing community links, or research interests in health inequalities, are especially well placed to adopt this approach. With modest funding and strong relationships, student-led advocacy can become a sustainable and scalable part of public health education and behavioural change in attitudes to donation.

8+ events,
including lectures, conferences, and panel discussions

Reached **1,400 students**

Trained
50+ students
as interns

Wide media coverage
across ITV News, university radio, and more

Luton Town Hall
lit up pink as part of Organ Donation Week

Student-led awareness stall in Luton

Luton Town Hall lit up pink for Organ Donation Week

Focus on Living Kidney Donation

Yes I donate LIVING DONATION

Around 5,000 people in the UK are currently on the national transplant waiting list for a kidney. Sadly, some will lose their lives to kidney disease before a suitable donor is found. Across the UK, more than 1,000 people each year donate a kidney or part of their liver while they are still alive to a relative, friend or someone they do not know.

While dialysis can offer short-term support it does not offer a long-term solution and so, for many, remaining positive that a donor can be found becomes their best and only hope. A kidney transplant—particularly from a living donor—offers significantly better long-term outcomes. For patients with end-stage kidney disease, the hope of a transplant often represents their best and only chance at a longer, healthier life.

Living kidney transplants provide on average **90%** survival at 10 years compared to **75%** survival via deceased donor transplants.

A **third of people** waiting for a kidney transplant are from Black, Asian and ethnic minority communities.

Grants awarded

In 2023/24, £112,500 was awarded across seven community organisations for Living Kidney Donation projects building on from the earlier successful Living Transplant Initiative.

Living Kidney

£112,500
awarded
7 projects funded

Case study

Jain and Hindu Organ Donation Alliance (JHOD) - Building a Bridge to Living Donation

How culturally-matched advocates, embedded in the hospital pathway, helped patients navigate the complex journey to living kidney donation.

JHOD (Jain and Hindu Organ Donation Alliance) is a charity dedicated to significantly increasing the number of organ donors from Jain and Hindu communities in the UK, aiming to ensure that no one in need dies waiting for a transplant.

JHOD delivered a pioneering project to address a critical gap in the living kidney donation pathway: the lack of culturally adapted support for patients from diverse backgrounds. The initiative was born from the personal experiences of its founders, including living kidney donor Prafula Shah, who recognised from her own experience that patients needed a trusted bridge between themselves and the clinical teams at hospitals.

The project's unique strategy was to embed a culturally competent advocate directly into the hospital's advanced care clinic. This allowed the project to support patients for whom transplant discussions had begun, offering one-on-one guidance to help them and their families explore the possibility of finding a living donor.

Organ donation community event

What Was Delivered

The project successfully integrated culturally-sensitive support into the clinical setting while also running broader community awareness campaigns.

Embedded patient support pathway: The project's innovative design involved embedding two dedicated outreach coordinators within the Royal Free Hospital's renal team: one from the Jain and Hindu community, and another to support patients from the African and Caribbean communities. To navigate any potential challenges, the coordinators were integrated within the hospital team, ensuring they could work smoothly and effectively as trusted partners.

The coordinator for the Jain and Hindu community provided one-on-one support to 19 patients during their regular clinic appointments, with two of those receiving intensive support. This support was crucial for building trust, with the coordinator answering questions patients felt unable to ask clinicians, often in community languages like Gujarati. The coordinator for the African and Caribbean community saw a similar number of patients, and their approach also involved engaging with patients through a weekly church meeting, which acted as a trusted community partner for the project.

Culturally tailored information: To counter the "one-size-fits-all" approach to patient information, which Prafula noted from her own experience can be hard to digest, the service addressed practical and cultural questions that are often barriers to donation. Having a coordinator with a shared cultural and faith background created a safe and trusted space where patients felt comfortable enough to ask questions they may otherwise have felt inhibited to ask their clinical team. A common theme was anxiety around the financial impact of donating. Prafula recalled one man who was ready to be tested to donate to his wife after learning that potential donors can be reimbursed for some loss of earnings - a vital piece of information he had never received before. The coordinator also helped with culturally specific queries, such as dietary questions for patients following vegetarian or vegan diets.

Faith community events: The project team ran several large-scale community events in partnership with faith and community groups, reaching over 695 people in total. Events included a gathering with the Lohana community (200 attendees) and a collaboration with BAPS temple in East London (395 attendees).

These events combined lived experience, clinical information, and spiritual leadership, including a video from the global spiritual head of BAPS supporting organ donation. The impact was significant: a survey at one event showed support for living donation jumping from 48 attendees to 270 after the session.

The BAPS event was part of a "Sabha" - a quarterly family-oriented gathering for the BAPS congregation. Prafula explains these are large, multi-generational events where families listen to a spiritual discourse and share a meal, creating a relaxed and trusted environment for discussion and ensuring the "taboo aspects of donation can be addressed by different generations working together."

Strategic clinical partnerships: The project was built on a strong three-way partnership between JHOD, the Royal Free's renal team, and the hospital's organ donation committee. The project was championed by a senior transplant surgeon who acted as its sponsor.

Digital support and outreach: The project combined its in-person work with significant digital engagement. This included social media campaigns that reached over 55,000 people and the sharing of 300 resource packs to support the community. Digital tools, including regular contact via WhatsApp, were also crucial for direct patient support and follow up - with over 141 follow ups provided to patients.

JHOD (Jain and Hindu Organ Donation Alliance) event

Learning and Legacy

Cultural trust is the bridge

The project's success was built on trust. This shared heritage established the coordinator as a trusted messenger, allowing patients and their families to absorb complex information and feel truly supported. JHOD's work highlighted the critical situation for patients without culturally-sensitive support, where a lack of trust and understanding meant that essential conversations about living donation were simply not taking place.

Build a multi-layered partnership

A key learning is the value of building a formal, structured partnership to achieve impact. The project's foundation was a "three-way partnership" between JHOD, the hospital's renal team, and the organ donation committee, with a senior transplant surgeon acting as a crucial project sponsor. This collaborative structure was essential for creating a trusted bridge between the community and the clinic, providing the project with the legitimacy and deep integration needed to effectively support patients.

Living Donor Coordinators are crucial allies

A key learning was the importance of building a close, collaborative relationship with the hospital's official Living Donor Coordinators. Prafula states they are "absolutely crucial for the success of these programs" because they are the patient's "go-to person".

Hospital integration is powerful but challenging

Embedding the service directly into the patient pathway is highly effective. However, it comes with significant challenges related to NHS governance and bureaucracy. While these creative solutions proved to be the most viable path forward, they were not a quick fix and still involved significant challenges and delays within the complex hospital system. This experience directly informed JHOD's model for future work; in a subsequent project, the coordinator was not a hospital employee but was instead registered as an official hospital volunteer, allowing them to effectively engage with patients while navigating these complexities.

Empower patients to own their journey

Patients on dialysis are often in a vulnerable position and may "hide their illness and their situation from their family members". This project empowered them by providing the clear, culturally relevant information needed to have confident conversations with their families about living donation and "own their journey".

Scalability and future vision

JHOD is proud that the project has created a successful model for working within a hospital setting, one that Prafula believes "can be scaled nationally if there was the will, the conversations and the partnerships". Prafula noted that their work has had a lasting impact beyond the specific project with other hospitals now informally referring patients to them.

However, she is realistic about the significant barriers to scaling, believing that overburdened hospital teams who are "just so busy being medics" are unlikely to adopt this model without a strong external push. The project's most significant contribution to future scalability is the agile workaround it discovered. The learning that a paid coordinator, registered as an official hospital volunteer, can overcome significant governance barriers is the key to making this model more nimble and easier for other trusts to adopt without getting stuck in processes that could otherwise "take years to navigate".

This approach presents a real opportunity to transform the experience for kidney patients on dialysis, giving them the culturally-sensitive support and confidence they need to explore living donation and take ownership of their journey.

2 outreach workers recruited, partnering with Royal Free Hospital

38 patients received crucial **121 support**

Pre/post event survey: living kidney donation support jumped **from 48 to 270**

55,000 reached via social media

300 resource packs shared

Organ donation community events

Focus on Stem Cell Donation

Stem cells are the body's building blocks—produced in the bone marrow and forming the foundation of healthy blood. These cells play a vital role in the body's ability to fight infection, regenerate tissue, and recover from disease.

Stem cell donation is used to treat a wide range of life-threatening conditions, including various types of cancer, immune deficiencies, and genetic disorders. For many patients, particularly those with rare tissue types, a stem cell transplant may be their only hope of survival.

As with blood and organ donation, ethnic matching is crucial. The closer the genetic match between donor and recipient, the greater the chance of a successful transplant and long-term recovery. Unfortunately, people from Asian, Black, African, and Caribbean backgrounds are also significantly under-represented on the UK's stem cell donor registers, making it harder for patients from these communities to find a match.

Only 37% of transplant recipients from minority ethnic backgrounds receive the best stem cell donor match from an unrelated donor, compared to nearly **72%** for **white transplant recipients.**

Grants awarded

In 2023/24, a total of £102,231 was awarded to support eight community-led projects focused on increasing awareness and registration for stem cell donation. This work was delivered in partnership with Anthony Nolan, who co-funded our stem cell partners.

Stem Cell

£102,231
awarded
8 projects funded

Case study

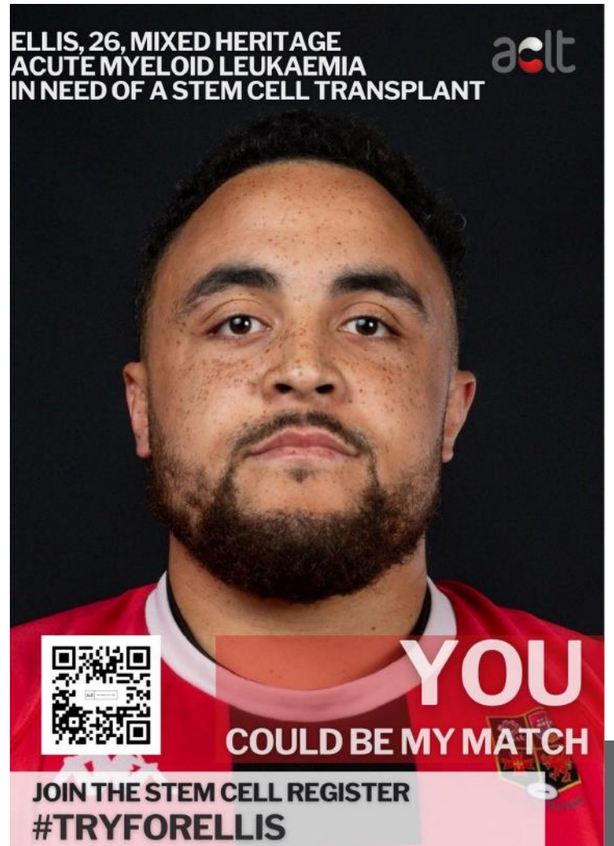
The African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust (ACLT) - Mobilising Communities to Grow the Stem Cell Register

How ACLT leveraged personal stories, high-energy events, and strategic partnerships to save lives and inspire a new generation of stem cell donors.

aclt Saving lives through bone marrow blood & organ donation

The African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust (ACLT) is a multi-award-winning charity driven by a simple, powerful mission: that no one should die waiting for a donor. For nearly three decades, ACLT has been providing hope to patients with blood cancer and other illnesses who require a stem cell transplant to save their life.

The charity's work is rooted in the powerful personal story of co-founders Orin and Beverley's son, Daniel, whose own battle with leukaemia and search for a donor ignited a movement.
This project built on that legacy, using a multi-layered approach of high-impact events, patient-led appeals, and digital campaigns to break down myths and inspire people from diverse backgrounds, particularly young people, to join the stem cell register.



Patient appeal for rugby player, Ellis Joseph

What Was Delivered

Over 29 years, ACLT's work has resulted in adding over 200,000 potential donors to the UK stem cell register and finding matches that have saved well over 180 lives. This project continued that work with a targeted focus on registering young people aged 16-30 years.

High-impact community events: ACLT's strategy is to "go where people already are". The team attended numerous high-footfall community events, including the Black Business Show, Soul Town Festival, Notting Hill Carnival, and City Splash, to engage directly with their target audience with thousands of attendees at some events and resulting in over 1,200 stem cell registrations mainly from Black communities.

At these events, the team often leads with stem cell registration before opening up conversations about blood and organ donation, a successful "hat trick" approach. The physical act of joining the stem cell register is a straightforward cheek swab. By starting with this simple action, it helps "reduce the perceived friction in people's minds about getting involved" with donation in general, making it a good entry point to the other types of donation.

The team also takes their message to unconventional venues. At the funeral of a young Ghanaian man who passed away from blood cancer, their talk inspired attendees to register as as a "lovely tribute" that led to a future partnership with Google after the man's sister, a Google employee, invited them to speak at her company.

Patient appeals: A core part of the project involved focusing efforts around the real-time appeals of patients searching for a donor. This provides a sharp focus and powerful motivation for communities to act.

Campaigns included the "Try4Ellis" appeal for rugby player Ryan Ellis, which saw the team conduct numerous registration drives along the M4 corridor to Bristol, and an appeal for Brenda McKenzie in Islington, which included TV slots on ITV West and London Tonight to raise awareness. In a particularly special moment, an ACLT team member was by Brenda's side at her doctor's appointment when she received the wonderful news that a donor had been found for her.

School and youth engagement: The project successfully partnered with 11 schools. In the controlled environment of a school assembly, the team uses engaging tools like music, videos, and interactive tech like Mentimeter to capture students' attention and shift their perspectives on donation in real time and resulting in over 600 stem cell donations.

A key to success is peer-to-peer connection. ACLT recruits students as volunteers and ambassadors, who then help engage their own peers. Orin notes they "teach us new tricks, which we can then take forward to their peers and the next generation". This combination of peer-level energy and the founders' profound experience proves highly effective. A key part of ACLT's legacy is this self-sustaining volunteer 'chain of ambassadors – ensuring ACLT's engagement strategy also remains authentic, current and constantly refreshed.

Digital and influencer campaigns: The project was supported by digital campaigns that used influencers to amplify the message. Social media has been "quite pivotal" and a "driving force" for connecting the charity with a wider audience. It enables ACLT to link up with influencers who can "comment and share directly with their followers in ways that resonate and connect".

A webcast with influencer 'StevoTheMadman' was a key feature. His involvement was deeply personal, as his own brother had battled leukaemia at the same time as Daniel, giving his advocacy for stem cell donation a powerful authenticity. Orin notes the strategic value of the social media campaigns in successfully creating crucial "reach, which we are now benefiting from going forward".

The African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust (ACLT) community events

Learning and Legacy

Personal connection is the catalyst

The "magical lightbulb moment" for potential donors often comes from hearing a personal story. ACLT found that leading with the "why"- the story of Daniel and other real-time patient appeals - makes the need tangible and inspires action in a way that statistics cannot. "When people realise what it can do for someone, you can see the transformation in people in real time," said Orin. This realism inspires action.

Tailor the message and the messenger

Having a deep understanding of the audience is crucial. ACLT adapts its messaging, using "stem cell" for younger audiences and "bone marrow" for older ones who are more familiar with the term. They also empower younger team members who are on the same "frequency" as the students they are trying to reach, creating a more authentic connection.

Create a pipeline of advocates

The work doesn't stop at registration. By inviting young people to become volunteers and ambassadors, ACLT has created a "chain of ambassadors" - a self-sustaining cycle where those who are inspired go on to inspire others.

Build on a legacy of trust

ACLT's long-standing reputation and proven success, particularly with partners like Anthony Nolan, allows them to operate with an agility and efficiency that is core to their impact. Orin is most proud of the fact that they have built a "well-oiled machine" that can deliver an event almost every week. For Orin, the goal is to use that legacy to help others on the same path and "lift those who are coming behind us."

Events, events, events. Master the face-to-face connection

The core learning from ACLT's "events machine" model is the irreplaceable value of direct human connection. Their experience shows that consistent, face-to-face engagement creates the space for powerful stories to be shared and allows the team to witness the "transformation in people in real time" - a unique catalyst for inspiring action.

Scalability and future vision

The project provides a powerful and scalable blueprint for community-based donor recruitment. However, Orin notes that successful replication requires more than just duplicating activities. It depends on a deep, nuanced understanding of the target community to tailor the message effectively. Crucially, he emphasises that the success of a frontline team is only possible with a robust "support mechanism around them," including administration, fundraising, and strategic leadership that can clear political and stakeholder obstacles. With this foundational support and the right mentorship - which ACLT actively provides to other organisations - the model offers a clear and proven pathway for organisations to successfully engage communities and save lives.

1,200
new stem cell donors

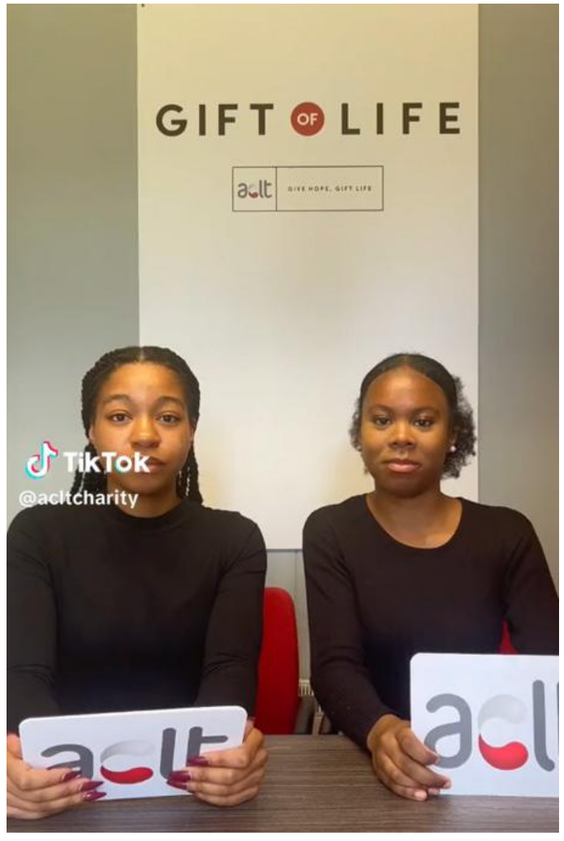
46
face-to-face events delivered

11
school partnerships

115,000+
people engaged through festivals, conferences, schools and more

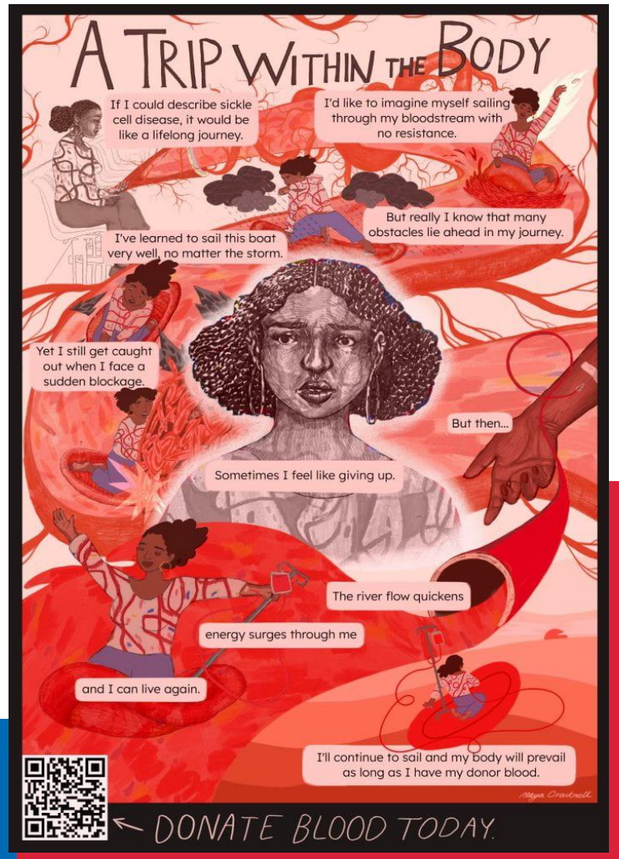
100,000+ people reached via social media

21 press releases and media across national TV and radio



Social Media activity and campaigns led by ACLT young volunteers and key influencers

Looking Ahead



Artwork by Maya-Cracknell as part of University of Brighton's Donor Research Team 'Comics for Life' event

As we move into the next phase of the Community Grants Programme, we are bulding on the powerful insights and successes of the past.

In recognition of the value of long-term, trusted relationships, the programme is evolving into a two-year funding model—designed to provide greater stability, deepen community partnerships, and support more sustainable, lasting impact.

This shift reflects our commitment to genuine investment in the communities we serve, enabling partners to plan further ahead and continue shaping behaviour change in ways that are relevant, and community led.

A key priority as we move forward is to collectively harness the richness of this work—whether through compelling case studies, creative campaigns, or the unique perspectives and lived experiences shared by our partners. These are not just powerful stories; they are vital sources of learning and innovation.

To truly maximise the impact of the Community Grants Programme, we must ensure that the insights and outputs generated are not siloed or treated informally but are integrated purposefully across NHSBT. Establishing clear, structured processes to embed this work into relevant strategies, teams, and planning cycles will be essential.

By doing so, we can ensure that the knowledge and community understanding our community partners bring is not just celebrated—but used strategically to inform our wider approaches to donor engagement, health equity, and service design. This will help us achieve a more inclusive, collaborative, and ultimately more effective donation landscape for all.

Appendix

Funded organisations

Blood

- ACLT (African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust)
- Adventures in Compassionate Commerce (AiCC)
- African Centre For Development and Research
- Black Blood Matters
- Black Health Initiative (BHI)
- Caribbean & African Health Network (CAHN)
- Cianna's Smile
- Equality Council UK (ECUK)
- Faiths Forum for London
- Father Hudson's Care - Brushstrokes Community Project
- Inspired by JLG LTD
- Legacy901 CIC
- RAFFA International Development Agency
- Rochdale Dawah Centre
- Sickle Cell Society
- Sickle Cell Suffolk
- Cells of a Generation

Deceased organ

- British Board of Scholars and Imams (BBSI)
- British Islamic Medical Association
- Halal Dinner Club (part of the Leaf Coaching CIC)
- ILM-Ornate Lane Ltd (Trading as Raising Explorers)
- Jain and Hindu Organ Donation Alliance (JHOD)
- Kidney Wales
- Muslim Women's Network UK
- Navnat Vanik Association
- QED UK
- Sadhu Vaswani Centre UK
- Shade 7 Limited
- Shree Swaminarayan Mandir Kingsbury
- University of Bedfordshire

Combined: deceased organ and blood

- Action On Blood
- Donor Research at University of Brighton
- Impact 4 life
- Medway African and Caribbean Association (MACA)
- Ujima Radio
- We Are Donors

Living Kidney

- Gift of Living Donation(GOLD) & Imperial College Renal and Transplant Centre
- Jain and Hindu Organ Donation Alliance (JHOD) and Royal Free Hospital Trust
- Newham Community Project
- Nishkam Healthcare Trust
- Shade 7 Limited
- Tales to Inspire
- Vanik Council (UK)

Stem Cell

- ACLT (African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust)
- Action On Blood
- Consortium of Muslim Professional (Consortium Networks Ltd)
- Jain and Hindu Organ Donation Alliance (JHOD)
- Muslim Doctors Association & Allied Health Professionals CIC
- One Voice Blackburn
- Team Margot Foundation
- UPAHAAR

NHS
Blood and Transplant

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