

annual review 2024



Big Leaf Foundation

helping displaced young people belong and grow

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welcome

What another incredible year for Big Leaf. We've seen our projects develop, our outreach increase; we've widened our activities with existing partners, and started fabulous new relationships with new organisations. We've received funding to allow us to grow bigger, stronger and more creative, and we are so grateful for this. And as ever, we've worked alongside some of the bravest, most determined and inspiring young people we could ever hope to meet.

But it hasn't been easy. Explosive conflicts in other parts of the world mean that more people are trying to reach safety on other shores. The journeys taken are increasingly perilous, and the risks are ever more acute. With safe routes into the UK reserved only for people on temporary schemes from Ukraine or Hong Kong, most displaced people can only access this country by putting their lives in the hands of the smuggling gangs and risking everything on a small, and often not seaworthy boat. The tragedies seen in the Channel, in which 21 people lost their lives last year alone, are reflective of the desperation people feel, and their lack of options to try any other way.

We have also lived in the shadow of growing hostility in the media, fed by a government led rhetoric around "illegal immigration" which so often did not reflect the basic humanity of those seeking sanctuary. We've seen more and more blatant misinformation around the whole subject of migration, and outright racism expressed by people with significant platforms. All of this has a painful impact on those trying to start new lives here and their ability to look forward with positivity and hope.

But the resilience and drive of those we support amazes us every day. We often watch open mouthed as people throw themselves into study, into training and into their futures. We have seen young people win national and academic awards; start new jobs, often in competitive sectors; seize upon chances to volunteer and gain work experience. We've seen them off to further and higher education and on to apprenticeships; and we've seen them grasp at every opportunity we can offer them with enthusiasm and determination.

Last week we received a message from one of our young people that read: "I am and will always be grateful for all the opportunities, experiences and support you gave me here. What you do is amazing and I hope all of you are aware of how much you change young people's lives, just as you changed mine."

Messages like this mean so much to us. But we consider it an absolute honour and joy to be able work side by side with the young people we support and to be so consistently amazed and inspired by them. It is not a one-way street. And as we watch some of our more settled young people grow and mature and step into leadership roles themselves, we know that they are also inspiring other young people around them, who might be new to the UK and unsure about where their future holds, showing them what's possible when you believe in yourself.

In December, we also marked our five-year anniversary and have been reflecting on all that we have achieved in that time – with more than 600 young people passing through our doors and finding a community here waiting to welcome and support them. It's this community that you, our partners, funders and supporters, have helped build and create, and we are entirely and endlessly grateful to the many, many people who work alongside us with kindness, compassion and a shared determination to give these young people the opportunities and the future that they deserve. We hope this review shows you just how much you've helped us achieve. Thank you for being part of it.

Vicki & Kayte | Big Leaf Foundation Founders



“

The only family we have is Big Leaf... you've taught us and you are keeping us going and keeping us safe.” Merhawi

Image © Big Leaf Foundation

about us

Our vision is of a community where displaced young people are valued, supported and given the opportunity to create better outcomes for themselves.

Big Leaf Foundation is an award-winning charity working with displaced young people aged 15-25 across Surrey.

Our aim is to provide a nurturing programme of activities, projects and events that focus on combating social isolation and improving wellbeing for the young people we support.

We want to engage the young people we work with to be excited about the opportunities available to them, and to value their unique talents and abilities so that they can rediscover their potential and move forward with renewed optimism.

We want to support and empower these young people to know they are more than the status they have been given, and help them find their place within the local community.

Our projects range from sports, equine-assisted learning and creative arts projects to full-day English language schools, specialised casework support and residential workshops, alongside leadership programmes, summer schools and progression opportunities. All of our projects are built with the focus of helping young people feel more empowered within their own lives, their local communities and Big Leaf itself.

www.bigleaffoundation.org.uk/about

“

I always come to you with my problems and sadness. But today I was very happy and I came to share my happiness with you. I am forever grateful to Big Leaf for bringing me back to life... thank you for being part of my journey.” M

about our beneficiaries

The young people we support have all been forced to leave their homes – many fled conflict and religious or political persecution, some were trafficked, some were kidnapped from their families and forced to train as child soldiers, and others were promised the dream of a better life and smuggled to the UK at huge cost.

Surrey is a significant receiver of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) with 143 (under 18s) living in care in the county in addition to the UASC care leavers. There are also many more displaced young people who have been resettled in Surrey with their families as part of government resettlement schemes and others who have arrived independently post-18 and have been placed in asylum hotels.

Most of the young people we support arrive as UASC and live in semi-independent accommodation. We've seen a slight decrease in demand for our services from hotels over the last year as the government pushed to move Afghan families on from temporary bridging accommodation and closed a local asylum hotel. But the number of UASC accessing our services continues to grow as existing beneficiaries spread the word among their peer network and refer new young people to us.

Separated children arrive alone, often in shock and without language or cultural understanding. They have to navigate their new lives, and the long and complex asylum system, without the support of family or friends. Even for those who come with family or through resettlement schemes, the experience can be overwhelming, confusing and incredibly difficult.

Cut off from everything that is familiar to them, displaced young people are particularly vulnerable to loneliness, isolation and anxiety. They face huge barriers in accessing legal support, education, employment and, above all, in finding a community.

230 young people
accessing our services

107 of whom were
new to us this year

9% girls &
women

62% aged
15-18

Over the past year, the outgoing Conservative Government created an exceptionally hostile environment for those seeking safety. The Illegal Migration Bill and the Rwanda Plan saw the UK turn its back on its commitments under the Refugee Convention, causing immense anxiety and distress for the young people we support. In the face of ever-changing laws, those working to help displaced communities scrambled to understand the implications of these appalling plans and offer meaningful guidance or reassurance to the communities they support.

There have been times of real darkness with young people calling us, terrified the Government was about to send them to Rwanda. We even had conversations about reshaping our entire model of working, which the Illegal Migration Act threatened. It seemed a real possibility that the fundamental right for people to claim asylum in the UK might cease to exist altogether.

Living in this kind of limbo can be debilitating for young people trying to rebuild their lives. But despite trauma, anxiety and an asylum system that seems focused on destroying their rights, these young people are resilient, strong and determined. They are full of hope and optimism, and we know that with the proper support, they can thrive in the UK and in their new communities.

“

The resilience and strength of these young people is incredible. They have been through so much and yet they are keen to learn, to be part of the communities they live in and to work and make a difference.” Zöe Franklin
Lib Dem Candidate MP for Guildford, Cranleigh & villages

our approach

We're a growing team of passionate individuals, determined to support and empower displaced young people to know they are more than their status, and help them find their place within their local community.

Our team includes refugee care and migration studies experts, experienced youth workers, volunteers with lived experience of forced displacement and finance, project management, fundraising and communications specialists. The team has combined experience of more than 20 years working with displaced young people.

our values

trust & transparency

Nothing is more important to us than trust, because so many of our young people have experienced a world in which they can trust no one. It's essential that we build trusted relationships with our young people, and that they have confidence that we will always act in their best interests. We do this through maintaining high standards of openness, honesty and transparency.

equality

We want everyone to feel welcome at our projects. We approach everything we do with empathy and compassion. We strive to create a sense of community to which we all belong, on equal footing and to create a safe, secure and non-judgemental space for young people to engage and build new friendships, explore new activities, and uncover their talents and passions.

growth

Everything we do is focused on promoting the personal growth of our young people – growth that allows them to know they are more than the status they have been given and that each one of them is unique and valued. Growth is also at the heart of our approach to governance. We prioritise team learning, work to embody best practice and aim to make each project better than the last.

working in partnership

To achieve our vision of a community where displaced young people are valued and supported we need to build strong connections within the community. We do this through working in close partnership with local organisations, agencies and businesses.

Over the last five years we've built a network of more than 70 community and multi-agency partners. These partnerships bring valuable skills and experience to our work, and are essential to building connection, trust and understanding within the community.

youth leadership

We recognise that young people with direct experience of forced displacement are best placed to create projects and campaigns that meet their needs and the needs of their peers. Our young leaders programme (p22) and new ambassadors project support young people to build skills and confidence, helping them feel more empowered within themselves, their local community and within Big Leaf itself. You can read more about youth leadership in action on p24.

our projects

Now in our sixth year, we've learnt a lot from the young people we support about the challenges they face. Our projects are designed to address these challenges and are built around four key strands – safety, health and wellbeing, connecting communities and growing knowledge. Read more about our projects on pages 8-24.



CAMPAIGNS & ADVOCACY | making our voices heard

Through our campaigns and advocacy work we raise awareness of the issues faced by displaced young people and speak out when their rights are under threat. This year has been challenging with the Illegal Migration Bill and the Rwanda Plan dominating the news and creating fear and anxiety.

The political and media landscape has become increasingly hostile towards those seeking sanctuary and as laws rapidly change, misinformation is rife. Working alongside same-sector partners we have amplified messages of welcome and lobbied the government and opposition parties to adopt a more compassionate and fair approach to asylum.

We have mobilised our supporters, written letters to our local MPs and worked with partner organisations to deliver open letters to the Home Secretary, Prime Minister and various newspapers. Organisations and individuals across the country have come together to oppose the Illegal Migration Bill and the Rwanda Plan and we've attended some brilliantly insightful seminars to build our understanding of the Bill and its implications for the young people we support.

We will continue to campaign for a fairer and more compassionate approach to asylum in the UK. Follow us on social media [@BigLeafSurrey](#) for the latest news and campaign actions.

“

Outsourcing our asylum system to other countries is never acceptable. It abandons our duty to share in the global responsibility towards those forced to seek safety.”

Open letter to Government about the Rwanda plan signed by Big Leaf alongside 221 organisations, community and faith leaders.

speaking up and speaking out

We want to provide young people with more opportunities to speak out on the issues affecting them. Our new ambassadors programme, launched in April 2024, will amplify young people's voices and experiences.

Building on the success of our Young Leaders programme (p22) and providing a progression route for graduates who want to engage with the media and public speaking, this programme provides the infrastructure and training to ensure they feel supported and safe to do so.

Over five weeks our new ambassadors will learn about advocacy, speaking with the media, staying safe online with the rise of the far right and effective public speaking techniques. We'll have sessions with the media and online experts and other youth ambassadors, journalists and successful public speakers.

Through this programme we want to create a network of like-minded peers who will support each other and Big Leaf to magnify the voices of people with lived experience of forced displacement.



Image © Vicki Felgate/Big Leaf Foundation

CASEWORK | supporting young people to access their rights

We provide complex casework advice and support, integrated into our project activities in both East and West Surrey. Through our work we aim to not only resolve the problems our young people face, but also support them to learn to advocate for their own rights and the rights of their peers.

Over the last year, the breadth of casework our team has taken on has grown significantly, as an unfortunate reflection of the increasingly hostile environment many of our young people find themselves in. Whether it's poor quality Home Office accommodation, evictions, drawn out age disputes, increased criminalisation or lack of access to housing solutions, our casework team has worked with and empowered young people to resolve these issues and their resilience and strength continues to inspire us.

“

We got an eviction letter and we have to leave [in 6 days]. Nobody could do anything for us... they cannot give us temporary accommodation.” F

a changing landscape

All of this has taken place with the backdrop of multiple anti-refugee laws being passed at the national level and an ever-shifting landscape of Home Office policy updates.

On the local level, funding and support for care leavers has noticeably decreased due to the cost of living crisis. Young people who have been granted refugee status and are trying to build the foundations of their new lives in the UK have faced huge barriers in finding meaningful work and stable housing.

This has meant our team has had to be flexible, reactive and resourceful in responding to a changing set of circumstances and needs, while rapidly learning and adapting to legislative changes.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

56 young people accessing casework

60% aged 15-18 years

29% of referrals included accommodation issues

78% positive outcome

case study

A attended our youth hub in Redhill and told our caseworker that he was sleeping rough in the park. He was a care leaver, and therefore should have been considered a priority need under the Housing Act 1996. But a breakdown at his previous accommodation meant there was a reluctance to listen to his needs from the professionals involved.

Through an intensive period of casework and advocacy we were able to support him to have his voice heard, and he has since moved to stable accommodation where he has been able to continue his education.



Image © planet_fox/pixabay

hotel closures and evictions

Throughout the first six months of the year our caseload was dominated by issues arising from the section 95 asylum hotels in Redhill and East Horsley. The isolated location of these hotels meant that there was very little available in terms of local support and the impact of this was particularly felt by young people who were undergoing age dispute issues or arrived post 18 and were therefore treated as adults.

On top of the difficulties in section 95 provision, a change in policy by the Home Office in July 2023 meant that after being granted refugee status, residents were being evicted from the hotels with just 7 days' notice. This change, combined with a push to clear the backlog of asylum cases, soon overwhelmed the homeless provision of Local Authorities across the country and resulted in a 223 per cent surge in street homelessness for people leaving asylum between June and September 2023.

We experienced this first hand, and worked hard to support our young people, and in many cases their families as well, as they went through the incredible stress of suddenly facing homelessness after what should have been a moment of such relief for them.

“

I have my keys now... I'm not homeless now. I'm really really thank you very much for helping me. I appreciate that.” A

the illegal migration act

While the introduction of the Nationality and Borders Act and the passing of the Illegal Migration and Safety of Rwanda Act presented challenges for our team in keeping abreast of the legislative changes, their real impact was the level of fear and anxiety they caused for the young people we support.

The increase in anti-migrant rhetoric left many young people feeling afraid, and the lack of easily available information about what the new laws meant, and to whom they would be applied, meant that misinformation was rife.

Through our projects, and particularly our youth hubs, we helped separate rumour from fact and supported young people to understand whether there was a real risk to them while also holding space for the distress and anxiety they were experiencing.

“

I am worried for my friend... he thinks he will be sent to Rwanda. He had a letter he doesn't understand. He is scared and he was told the Home Office will come for him.” K

thank you

With huge thanks to **Tresanton Trust** for its continued support and funding for our vital casework service and to our long-term casework volunteer **Alison** for the commitment and experience you bring to this role.



Image © Vicki Felgate/Big Leaf Foundation

YOUTH HUBS | providing a safe and welcoming space

Our youth hubs in Redhill and Guildford provide displaced young people with an opportunity to come together in a safe, familiar and welcoming space. We offer English language support through conversation, games and activities; and teach numeracy and life skills through our Food Counts project.

Our youth hubs have been running for over four years and are vital to our work. Last year, we welcomed more than 100 young people to our hubs.

In Redhill, table tennis, card games (Uno in particular) and informal English practice are the favourites. In Guildford, badminton, games and occasional sewing and arts and crafts activities run alongside English.

But the most important part of both hubs is cooking together and sitting down to share a meal. This is when the conversations happen and when we feel the most connected. Many of the young people enjoy helping out in the kitchen, cooking delicious food from around the world. This experience of sharing a meal is especially meaningful during Ramadan, when young people often join us to break their fast.

“

I am glad for hub and to come every week for food, and to meet my friends and new people and do activities. It is good to have this every week and I am very grateful for it.”

food counts

Thanks to funding from Surrey Country Council and the Department of Education we were also able to offer numeracy and life skills sessions for over 19s at both our hubs this year.

Most of the young people we support are here alone and must learn to cook and budget without family support. Finding the time and money to prepare home-cooked meals can be challenging.

Our Food Counts programme combined sessions on food safety and hygiene, nutrition and budgeting, with practical sessions preparing and cooking meals for the group.

thank you

With thanks to our hub volunteers, **Alison, Sofia, Scarlett, Jess, Alfie, Richard, Hannah** and **Ella**; our hub chefs, **Ash** and **Ro**; and to **Surrey County Council** and the **Department of Education** for funding our Food Counts project.

Sofia has been volunteering at our Guildford hub since February 2022. We invited her to be one of our first ever guest editors, sharing in her own words what it's like to work alongside our young people as a Big Leaf volunteer.

an invisible thread

My first evening hub was at the start of a new term. I met other volunteers and one of the regular hub attendees, who had invited a newcomer along. This new young person had only been in the country for a few weeks and it was encouraging to see he was already being taken care of, not just by Big Leaf, but also one of his peers.

This is the invisible thread running through my two years with Big Leaf... I see new young people come through our doors so often, usually side-by-side with one of our regular attendees. The support the young people offer each other is something that amazes me every week. It is a wonderful thing, to witness the transition of a young person who once attended hub shy and unsure, and with little English, bringing a new friend, showing them around and even translating for them at times.

I joined Big Leaf because I wanted to contribute to making even a small difference. It seems cliché but I suppose clichés exist because they sometimes have merit. My heart goes out to anyone experiencing forced displacement and having even the tiniest role in our young people's experience, and meeting them with warmth, kindness and encouragement, feels like some glimmer of meaning.

I see my role as a facilitator... supporting the young people to connect with Big Leaf staff and their peers and to feel a sense of achievement through learning a new game, trialling a new art or craft activity and improving their English or just finding time to have fun in a safe and supportive atmosphere.

“

One of the best moments... was when the newcomer from that first evening at hub announced they'd got their status... it felt like I'd witnessed their journey come full circle.”

I realised it had been two years since we met during our first time at hub, and they had finally received what they had been waiting for. No doubt they will have more challenges to face but I am humbled to have been a small part of their journey and to continue working with the team to offer them and other young people support and safety along the way. Another cliché, but I'll allow it.

Image © Sofia

Our volunteers make a huge impact in the lives of the young people they work alongside, whether through casework, teaching English, mentoring, running

31 volunteers

4 young people
volunteering with us

2093 hours
volunteered

activities at our hubs and sports sessions or applying for funding opportunities behind the scenes.

www.bigleafaffoundation.org.uk/volunteer

thank you

With thanks to all of our incredible volunteers who give their time and expertise to supporting displaced young people each year.



“

The ESOL lessons have been invaluable for all my young people, not only giving them the skills and confidence to learn English but also giving them the skills to adapt to their new lives in the UK.” Wendy, UASC keyworker

© Kayte Cable/Big Leaf Foundation

EDUCATION | providing opportunities to learn

One of the biggest barriers to anyone trying to resettle in the UK is a good understanding of English. Usually, people arrive as beginners in English, making it extremely challenging to find their feet in their new communities.

College places are often hard to access, particularly for those who have arrived after the start of the academic year. These delays in accessing education mean many young people are excluded from support, guidance and information that could significantly improve their situation.

We know that the young people we support are keen to learn English, and often frustrated by the lack of opportunities to do so. Although all of our projects carry an ESOL learning focus, we offer dedicated programmes for young people still awaiting educational placements, or that need a little extra help.

48 young people accessing ESOL

7 getting support with GCSEs

8 young people attending IELTS

English language school

Our full-day English language ‘school’ has been running for two years and has supported 48 young people with limited or no access to school or college this year.

Our sessions, held once a week during term time, offer a unique approach to learning English. We provide the specialised support that groups from mixed backgrounds need. Morning lessons focus on vocabulary, grammar, and numeracy skills, preparing participants for the UK education system. In the afternoons, we build cultural literacy and develop understanding of life in the UK with activities, field trips and guest visitors.

We’ve found that one of the best ways to settle into a new community is through exploring the local history, of places and people. This year, we visited Guildford Castle, Lewis Carroll’s house, St Mary’s Saxon Church and Abbot’s Hospital. We also welcome community guests to our sessions, including officers from Surrey Police, faith leaders and politicians.

“

When I was struggling with my English, I was introduced to Naoe, a Big Leaf volunteer. She teaches me English which is extremely helpful to improve my language skills.” M

More and more of the young people we support want to go on to higher education and we're committed to providing opportunities, support and progression routes to help them achieve this goal.

GCSE study groups

For the second year running and thanks to our brilliant volunteer teachers, we were able to offer tailored sessions for seven young people studying GCSE Maths and English. The sessions focus on study skills and revision techniques and build confidence around exam papers using past papers and practice questions.

Without family support or a stable home environment, finding time and space to revise can be challenging. Evidence also shows that long-lasting relationships with trusted teachers impacts positively on GCSE attainment, as does extra tuition. Thanks to our long-term volunteers, Naoe and Chris, we've been able to provide this consistent support.

IELTS sessions

Last spring, one of our Young Leaders asked if we could help him prepare for his International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exams - which he needed to pass in order to apply for university. We're committed to listening to our young people and being flexible to their needs, so our Co-founder and Programmes Manager, Kayte, started running IELTS-focused sessions for eight of our higher learners, as part of our English language school.

Three have since passed their IELTS exams and have university offers. R achieved an incredible score of 8.5.

“

The Big Leaf IELTS sessions absolutely helped me achieve this score. Especially the writing feedback that Kayte gave me and the speaking practice we did every time, even outside of IELTS sessions.” R

“

I had a good time, it was very interesting. We saw 3D printers making objects and played virtual reality games... I made a circuit board... and we learnt how electrical circuits are used in machines. It made me happy to visit the universities and learn new things.” MS

exploring local universities

Building on the success of our Women in Higher Education sessions last year, we spent three days with Surrey Higher Education Outreach Network during the spring half term.

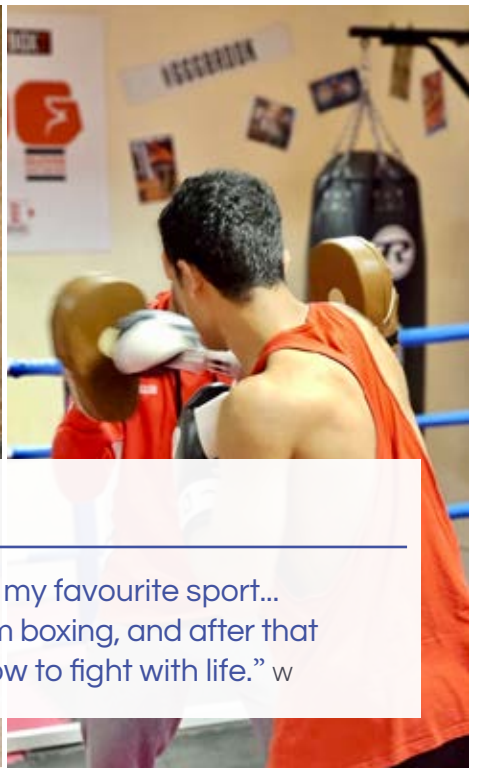
Together with 20 young people we visited the University of Surrey, Royal Holloway University of London and the University for the Creative Arts, to explore some of the courses on offer and discuss pathways into university.

We had a taste of what it might be like to study at each university, chatting with students and professors and joining workshops and seminars - from mechanical and electrical engineering to business management and creative art sessions. We also looked at foundation courses, apprenticeship opportunities, internships and blended learning options.



thank you

With thanks to our fabulous ESOL and GCSE volunteers, **Annabel, Naoe** and **Chris**; the **University of Surrey Widening Participation team** and **Surrey Higher Education Outreach Network**; **University of Creative Arts** and **Royal Holloway University of London** and all the tutors.



“

Boxing is my favourite sport... when I am boxing, and after that I know how to fight with life.” w

Images © Big Leaf Foundation

SPORTS | improving health and connecting through sport

Our sports activities are our most popular sessions. More than 130 young people joined sessions this year and with regular attendees often bringing recent arrivals, it's also one of our first contact points with young people new to the area.

Sport is a vital part of what we do. It brings young people together, promotes health and wellbeing and is often one of our first contact points with young people new to the area. It helps young people and our community partners to build mutual understanding and builds respect between participants.

This year we worked with professional coaches to offer regular sessions in football, basketball and to trial boxing for the first time. Our sports coaches are valued partners who work with enthusiasm, skill and compassion and we couldn't run the sessions without them. We're proud that Martin, who coaches our Guildford football team, received a sports award from Reigate & Banstead Borough Council this year in recognition of his work.

We also work with local teams so that young people can access sports activities in their local communities - with ten young people now playing for local cricket teams, two playing with football clubs and two in local boxing clubs.

For the second year we joined the Surrey FA Refugee League. Working in partnership with Surrey Police, Surrey FA created the league to improve football opportunities for displaced young people in Surrey and upskill participants.

One of our aims this year was to develop leadership and progression routes for those keen to pursue a career in sport. Thanks to Chelsea FC, six of young people attended Sports Leadership training at Stamford Bridge, exploring different career opportunities and pathways.

“

When I come to football, my mind is free. I see people like me, with difficulties like me, and we give each other hope. My coach is smiling at me, and I feel welcome. Everyone encourages each other - do you best, do your best. I remember this for my rest of life too. I will do my best.” MG

thank you

With thanks to our coaching partners **Chelsea Foundation**, **Upskill Coaching**, **PM Active**, **Basketball4All**, and **Redhill Amateur Boxing Club**; local teams **Guildford United**, **Redhill Youth FC**, **Reigate Priory Cricket Club** and **South Nutfield CC**; and our funders **Active Surrey**.

132 young people attended football

22 joined basketball

11 young people came to boxing sessions

Koye joined our core team in June 2022 and runs the Sports Programme for Big Leaf. He joined us with a desire to showcase the benefits of using “sports for good” an interest he found since he started practising Judo over six years ago, back home in Nigeria.

my big leaf family

It's now more than two years since I joined Big Leaf, and my experience can be described in one word, 'family'.

Like a great family, my ever-dependable team, including my colleagues, our coaching partners and volunteers, provide all the support I need to try out and test new ideas through sports with and for the young people we work with. This has helped me to settle well since I arrived in the UK in 2022.

On the other hand, the young people we work with give me the love I need to trust my experience of settling here and working with them. They are a lovely bunch!

I find the experience of working with them has helped to further grow my interest in showcasing the benefits of sports for human development, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, including displaced young people who are often isolated primarily due to the communication gap created by their limited use of English. This forms a huge source of motivation for me to want to do more and be more as an individual and a member of this family.

I always look forward to all our sports projects because they offer a safe place for everyone (including myself). The vibe we share is deliberately very welcoming for everyone - our coaches, our volunteers, and every young person who turns up.

“

I secretly think I get the most from our sessions because it is very soothing to watch the smiles on everyone's faces and the joy they take away from the sessions.”

Because of this, it is very hard for me not to join in all our sports activities, and I have learned to play basketball, boxing, cricket and even football, just by being a part of this family. Beyond sports, working with Big Leaf also allows me to participate in other activities, and some of the most memorable ones are being at Jamie's Farm, singing at our events and any given opportunity, and winning at the Surrey FA tournaments with the boys.

At times, I have to pinch myself to remind myself that this is meant to be work. This is what I get from working with Big Leaf - the feeling of being young again and the experience of such a fulfilling job.

thank you

With thanks to our brilliant sports volunteers, **Nikki, Anto, Henry, Abdulsalam** and **Sabir**, for showing up each time we ask, for caring and for making the sessions welcoming and fun. We'd also like to thank all of the young people we work with who lend us their ears and minds to test new ideas and work with us to shape the programme.



Images © Big Leaf Foundation

“

When I met Big Leaf, I knew they cared about us. But since volunteering, I realise how much effort and dedication... and above all love they put into making every young person happy regardless of their circumstances.” R

REFUGEE WEEK | celebrating creativity and community

We want to raise awareness of the issues faced by displaced young people and encourage connection and cohesion in our communities. One way we do this is through our Refugee Week programme.

Refugee Week is a UK-wide festival celebrating the contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary. It's a platform for displaced people to share their experiences and creative work on their terms. It's also a chance to engage the local community in our work.

We want all of our projects and events to reflect the the young people we support and our Refugee Week events were co-created in partnership with one of our graduate Young Leaders, R.

The theme for Refugee Week 2023 was compassion and we spoke about what compassion means and the different ways in can be shown.

building community awareness

We co-hosted a film-screening of 'On Our Doorstep' at the Electric Theatre in Guildford. The film takes a behind-the-scenes look at the extraordinary grassroots movement that formed to help people stuck in the Calais 'Jungle' refugee camp before it was demolished. Following the screening, author and activist, Gulwali Passarly, joined the film's producer, Verity Wislocki, and guests from Refugee Community Kitchen and Amnesty International for a panel discussion about the UK asylum-system.

compassion for nature

R said that showing compassion for the environment was important to him and his peers. He wanted to show care and love to the place we call home and do a simple act that would benefit everyone. So with young people from our English language school, we built bee hotels to support solitary bee populations.

“

It was a beautiful project and we learned a lot about bees. I like that we take care of them because they are very small beings but very important to nature and the world.” J

We also wanted to show the power of compassion and what can happen when we all come together and we invited our partners, funders, volunteers and young people for an evening of art, music and shared food to celebrate our community.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

72 young people

149 partners, volunteers and community attendees



music connects

We know that music has incredible community-building power and we welcomed our Music Connects group to run an open mic night at the event.

We launched Music Connects four years ago, and in that time, it has become one of our most effective tools for connecting young people.

It's difficult for displaced young people to meet those local to Surrey. Language and cultural barriers, separate ESOL classes in college and a lack of family and community networks make it challenging for these groups to mix.

Music Connects brings these young people together to create music and write songs that reflect the group's musical styles and experiences. The project challenges young people to overcome cultural and language barriers and builds genuine connections and friendships.

We ran a two-day workshop with Surrey Arts in preparation for the open mic night, working together to craft, write and rehearse songs. Participants embraced the linguistic and cultural differences that might be seen as a barrier to collaboration, incorporating different musical styles and languages into their pieces. Throughout the evening the group shared their music, singing and rapping in different languages and styles from across the globe.

“

It's been an incredible evening. We were so moved by the evocative art pieces, incredible music and the touching speech by R...we're so grateful to be here and for all you do.”

Lucy Zirins, Surrey Arts

“

In this picture I tried to portray the feeling of children who left home, family. When you really lack parental care, the only way out for you is to draw a loved one and believe that you can hug them. The painting depicts a girl who painted her mother and is trying to feel this love again.” SK



Image @ SK

celebrating art and culture

We've seen many young people find self-expression through art and we wanted to include an exhibition of work as part of the event. Young people created incredible pieces – exploring the theme of compassion through sculpture, painting and drawing.

Our hub chef, Ash, worked with the young people to cook food from their home countries and together we served dishes from South America, North Africa and the Middle East.

You can view images and artwork from the week at www.bigleaffoundation.org.uk/refugee-week-23

thank you

With thanks to **R** for his dedication to making Refugee Week a success; the incredible **Surrey Arts** for running the workshop and coordinating the open mic night; and to the **Boiler Room Guildford** for hosting the event.



Image © HM

GARDEN PROJECT | learning skills and connecting to home

Our new gardening project brings young people together to transform disused land into small community gardens, supporting them to gain the skills and knowledge to plant and grow in their own gardens.

From our time at Jamie’s Farm we’ve seen how much the young people we support enjoy gardening and cultivating land. It encourages a sense of ownership and pride and is an opportunity to build new skills or reconnect with existing ones, often learnt from parents and grandparents back home.

We wanted to include gardening in our activities but it was a real challenge to find the ideal plot to start. In April (just in time for the new growing season), we found a willing partner in St Mary’s Church, Guildford.

Thanks to a generous donation from one of our supporters, we were able to buy essential tools needed to start clearing an overgrown area of the churchyard. We also benefited from the support of local gardeners from the Merrow Horticultural Society and Guildford Allotment Society, who donated seeds and plants.

“

It’s a lovely experience for me. It’s like a sporting exercise for me because it uses all parts of my body. I know in the future it will have a positive impact on my health.” HM

Working with a team of young people, we cleared the mass of brambles and planted courgettes, tomatoes, potatoes, pumpkins and sunflowers. The hot weather in June gave these plants a flying start and we harvested our potatoes in July, cooking and eating them together in the churchyard.

Inspired by this progress, we set up four other gardens in the shared houses where some of our young people live. Each garden is different, some are container gardens, with tomatoes and cucumbers growing in large pots, while others have a small garden plot with an array of vegetables and flowers.

The young people have a sense of pride and ownership in these gardens, and we are incredibly proud of everything they have achieved.

thank you

With thanks to our brilliant gardening volunteers, **Alison, Alex** and **HM**; to our **donor** for providing financial support; and to **Merrow Horticultural Society** and the **Guildford Allotment Society** for sharing seeds and plants to kick-start the project.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

5 gardens **15** participants

48 individual gardening hours



Image © Kayte Cable/Big Leaf Foundation

“

This is the happiest I have been in a long time.” M

SUMMER CAMP | building trust and friendships

Each summer, we take a group of young people to a farm for a five-day residential. It’s one of our favourite activities of the year. Big Leaf started with a Summer Camp, and having seen how transformative the experience is, we’re committed to keeping this annual tradition alive.

These trips are the perfect place to spend time with the young people we support, getting to know them and building trust so we can better support them in the months and years ahead. For the young people it’s a chance to spend time outdoors, relax, sleep and connect with one another.

For the last four years we’ve hosted our Summer Camp at Jamie’s Farm – a working farm that specialises in supporting disadvantaged young people at risk of academic and social exclusion. It aims to build self-esteem, improve wellbeing and help young people develop positive relationships with those around them.

“

You honoured us and brought us to the farm and we enjoyed a great time with you. Thank you very much.” N

We spend our time working on the farm, looking after the animals, cooking meals together, taking long walks in the surrounding countryside and playing games.

But it’s the daily check-in meetings that often have the most impact. During these meetings we talk about our day and how we’re feeling. But we also celebrate each other, giving ‘shout-outs’ to others in the group for doing something well. Often it’s for brilliant teamwork or for looking out for each other or showing patience and determination in the farm tasks. But sometimes the shout-out is just for being open and honest about how they’re feeling and for trusting us all enough to tell us how we can support them.

For young people who have been moved around from place to place or feel forgotten in our asylum system, it can be hard to know who to trust or to feel valued and appreciated. Jamie’s is an incredibly positive place where all young people are valued and acknowledged. Our time at the farm, talking, sharing food, working together as a team, helps build this much-needed trust and shows them that we are here to support and to lift them up when things feel hard.

thank you

With thanks to the **Jamie’s Farm team** in Lewes for your brilliant and continued support for us; and the young people we work with and to **Surrey Virtual School** for funding our Summer Camps.



“

I love to learn different language and culture. I'm learning to achieve... and show peace and love for every human being.” T

Images © Big Leaf Foundation

SUMMER SCHOOL | boosting language and combating isolation

Created to help young people prepare for the new academic year and mitigate some of the isolation experienced during the long summer holiday, our Summer School improves English and fosters connections with the community.

The long summer break can be challenging for displaced young people, who often have nothing to do and no funds to access activities or travel. We hear often from carers and key workers that young people's mental health is significantly impacted with long periods of time spent alone and cooped up in their accommodation.

Our Summer School is more than just a programme, it's a chance to connect with the local community, make friends, learn new skills and have fun.

Building on the success of last summer, we ran Summer School activities throughout August and increased our provision to offer dedicated sessions for those isolated in hotel accommodation. We worked with multiple community partners to deliver a varied programme, engaging 47 young people across four weeks.

Our partnership with St George's College is unique. Each summer, young people from Big Leaf spend three days with their sixth form students engaged in a brilliant programme of activities, including team games, street art, sports and cooking. It gives two groups of young people, who wouldn't ordinarily meet, the opportunity to find out more about the lives of others in their community and kick back and have fun together, whatever the language and cultural differences might be.

team building

We ran sessions with Surrey Outdoor Learning and Development (SOLD) and Sayer's Croft Outdoor Learning Centre focused on team building and communication skills.

We watched the young people support each other to complete the high ropes course and climbing wall; and listened as those who wanted to try swimming at Sayer's Croft talked about overcoming their fear of water after traumatic experiences crossing oceans to reach safety.

It's always profoundly impactful for young people to be out of their rooms and in fresh air and nature, and it provides space for new conversations and friendships to form.

“

I had no idea what was happening in Darfur. Talking to E taught me a lot. I can't stop thinking about what life would be like in their shoes... We're good friends now.” St. George's College 6th former

47 Big Leaf participants

1248 individual learning hours

8 partner orgs

“

It was a pleasure and honour to be there. These young people have been through so much. You do an amazing job supporting them.” Kawther Hashmi, Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum



connecting across communities

Over the last few years debates around asylum have become increasingly inflammatory. Media and political narratives often leave our young people feeling unwelcome and unsafe, and during Summer School there was a Far-Right protest outside one of the hotels where some of the young people live. We wanted to show them just how much support there is in the community and that they are safe here. Working with our partners at Elmbridge CAN and Surrey Police we organised a £20 community cricket match to bring people together and rebuild trust.

rights and responsibilities

Our final week, hosted at Surrey University with police officers, nursing students, junior lawyers and local faith leaders, focused on living safely in the UK.

Our time with officers from Surrey Police had a had a profound impact, challenging preconceptions and helping rebuild trust in authority figures.

During our Shared Faith day, five different faith leaders joined us to talk about multiculturalism and how faiths can co-exist peacefully. We chatted about religious intolerance and what people can do if their faith is under attack, learnt about different faiths, and then visited Guildford Cathedral where we filled the prayer tree with prayers for peace.

“

In my country, police don't play games and help people. I don't like them in my country, but here I do.” A



final celebrations

For our final day, the Surrey University Widening Participation and Outreach team (WPO) organised a sports day - giving young people the chance to have a go at dodgeball, netball and ultimate frisbee - before coming back together for the WPO's hilarious and inventive interpretation of hungry hippos.

It was a brilliant month with a lot of positive feedback from participants and partners alike. We saw young people improve their English, grow in confidence and build new connections with other young people and our community partners.

thank you

With thanks to **Surrey High Sheriff Youth Awards** for funding the programme and to all of our brilliant partners: **Surrey Police, Surrey University WPO team, Sayer's Croft Outdoor Learning Centre, Surrey Outdoor Learning & Development, Woking** and all of the **faith leaders** for bringing this programme to life.



Image © Toby Athersuch/Big Leaf Foundation

“

I've learnt that to be a good leader it's important to communicate and share your ideas and it's important to listen. It's important to be humble, not arrogant. I will use these skills as a compass to guide me towards my future goals.” N

YOUNG LEADERS | empowering young people to lead

”

Our Young Leaders programme builds leadership skills, confidence and knowledge to help young people feel more empowered within themselves, their local community and within Big Leaf itself.

We're committed to supporting displaced young people to participate in the development and leadership of Big Leaf and become active leaders within their community, making lasting changes to issues that affect their lives. Our Young Leaders programme is core to achieving this.

Thanks to funding from the Listening Fund we were able to run two programmes this year, graduating 12 new young leaders.

Over the course of ten weeks each group came together to learn about leadership, legal rights, how to create change and support others. The projects started with a residential at Jamie's Farm, the ideal place to break the ice, get to know one another and build connections. This residential was followed by workshops on human rights and democracy with our brilliant partners at Surrey University School of Law (see opposite).

“

I always feel very privileged to come and share with these young people and hear something of their stories.” Zöe Franklin, Lib Dem Candidate MP for Guildford

There's real thought and intentionality... and something so authentic about the journey that Big Leaf has gone on with their young people to support them to do the work of being an ambassador in a safe and comfortable way.”

Mercy Shibemba, Collective Discovery

This year we also joined forces with the Guildford Shakespeare Company and welcomed previous Young Leaders to co-lead sessions on public speaking and support with team-building.

Our volunteer mentors provided individual support with personal goals and progression from the programme.

Young Leaders is designed to support young people to speak out and advocate for themselves and their peers. Graduation provides the perfect stage to show their newfound public speaking skills and it's also a chance for our funders, partners and community to hear what their support means to the young people.

“

This is the future. We are the future leaders of the world. We are the ones who are going to make this world better.” E

With thanks to **The Listening Fund** for supporting this programme. You can hear more about our Young Leaders programme on Collective Discovery's Shift podcast www.collectivediscovery.co.uk/shift (episode 4)

We've been working in partnership with Surrey University School of Law for over three years – bringing law students and our young leaders together to explore human rights, democracy and employment law. We asked Liz and Jessica to share their thoughts on the partnership.

learning from each other

We feel so fortunate to have built such a unique relationship with Big Leaf having met the co-founders, Kayte and Vicki, four years ago. Together, we planned and delivered bespoke legal confidence sessions with Lawyers Against Poverty which are now part of the Young Leaders programme. Our law students have worked together to design workshops on employment law, human rights, citizenship and democracy, to support displaced young people to learn about their legal rights and obligations in the UK.

We have also collaborated with Big Leaf, and the theatre company, Compass Collective, on a highly successful initiative about trust in the rule of law, for which we were awarded funding from the University.

Working with Big Leaf has been the most inspiring, enjoyable, and important initiative that we have been involved with. We admire Big Leaf's young people enormously and are grateful to them for making the workshops so engaging. Having the opportunity to discuss, learn from each other, explore and hear different perspectives, stories and varying views on all kinds of topics, including the laws back home and how the law works in this country is incredibly interesting and empowering.

Elizabeth Williams

Associate Professor in Law, Surrey University

What started as workshops for Young Leaders turned out to be a place where we learnt a lot more from them. The open learning environment enabled both sides to exchange ideas and opinions on the complexities of the law. It helped us explore the challenges of applying our daily university learning to real life situations. Every year more and more students sign up to be part of this programme.

“

It has taught us how to use our skills to create impact and opened our eyes to what we can do to help.”

It has helped create new conscious young leaders at the School of Law who are keen on pursuing pro-bono roles alongside their other commitments. This would not have been achievable without the proactive participation of your young leaders in the workshops. They have the amazing ability to create waves of change by brining their whole selves and share their experiences and ideas with us.

Jessica Mathew

Law student, Surrey University

thank you

Whether it's supporting with venues, providing sports coaches or facilities, co-delivering sessions, sharing best practice or offering strategic or funding advice, we're exceptionally grateful to **all our partners** who give their time, expertise and commitment to supporting displaced young people in their communities.



© Surrey & Sussex Police and James Harrison Productions

“

The film would mean nothing without the involvement of its three young contributors. What incredible stories. Even though I’ve seen it many times, every time I am taken by their bravery. I’m not sure I could have done what they’ve done.” James Harrison, filmmaker

YOUTH LEADERSHIP IN ACTION | a new generation of leaders

Since we launched our Young Leaders programme in January 2022, we have seen graduates go on to achieve great things. They have shared their stories in the national media, co-delivered training courses for organisations, including Surrey Police, presented to young people at local colleges, shared their experiences of our work with funders, co-created Big Leaf events and helped inform our strategy.

Our vision is of a community where displaced young people are valued, supported, and given the ability to create better outcomes for themselves. To achieve this, we need people to understand the context of forced displacement and the challenges young people face so they are better able to support and work alongside them.

We know that young people with direct experience of forced displacement are best placed to speak about the challenges they face, and we’re proud of all of our Young Leaders for everything they have done, and continue to do, to advocate for themselves and their peers.

9 speaking events with our young leaders

6 young people involved in media/press work

THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

reaching other young people

When we asked the first graduates what they wanted to achieve as Young Leaders, back in 2022, they said, “we want to help other young asylum seekers and refugees to access Big Leaf activities. We want other young people to feel supported like us”. Since then our Young Leaders have visited colleges to talk to other young people about our work and brought new young people along to our projects.

“

E messages us each time a new young person arrives in Redhill and asks if he can bring them to ESOL. Over the last year, he’s introduced five young people to us. He’s a brilliant ambassador and a great support to his peers.” Abby, ESOL teacher

training the police

This year, three of our Young Leaders worked with Surrey & Sussex police and film producers from James Harrison Productions to create a training video to help build understanding within the police and tackle misconceptions around forced displacement. The film has now been shared with 23 forces, reaching frontline officers and police staff across the UK.

sports ambassadors

Over the past year, we've focused on bringing more young people's voices into the design and delivery of our projects. One of the ways we've done this is through creating space for young people to shape our sports programme. We now have two sports ambassadors, who welcome new participants and set an example to others through their commitment and behaviour on the pitch. But they also challenge us, asking questions and giving advice on how to evolve our sports programme to engage more community members and build more partnerships so that we can offer routes to a wider variety of sporting activities.

self-advocacy

When we launched our Young Leaders programme we didn't have a pre-defined goal that all participants would become volunteers, ambassadors or leaders within Big Leaf. This was never our measure of success. We wanted to empower them to become leaders in their own lives and communities, and to make their own decisions about how to use their newfound skills.

For some this has meant advocating for themselves in pursuit of their educational and career goals. So often displaced young people are held back in college or told they don't meet the requirements for a particular course. Since graduating, Young Leaders M and A approached their colleges, making the case to be accepted onto their chosen courses. Both were, and A has since completed his Access to Higher Education course in Design and Architecture. M is taking her GCSEs this year and has just started work as a Healthcare Assistant, a huge step towards her ultimate goal of becoming a nurse.

For these two brilliant and determined young people, 'leadership in action' means following their dreams and showing other displaced young people what's possible when you believe in yourself and refuse to accept 'no' as an answer.

“

Before I became involved in Big Leaf, I was unsure of my own English Language, my own potential and lacked the confidence to pursue my dreams... Big Leaf has provided me with the tools, support and guidance necessary to grow into a strong and capable individual.” M

“

N continually has a positive impact on fellow residents and staff; taking new residents under his wing, showing them around, accompanying them to appointments, cooking for them and sharing whatever he has.”

Youth Matters Awards nomination 2024



Image © Toby Athersuch/Big Leaf Foundation

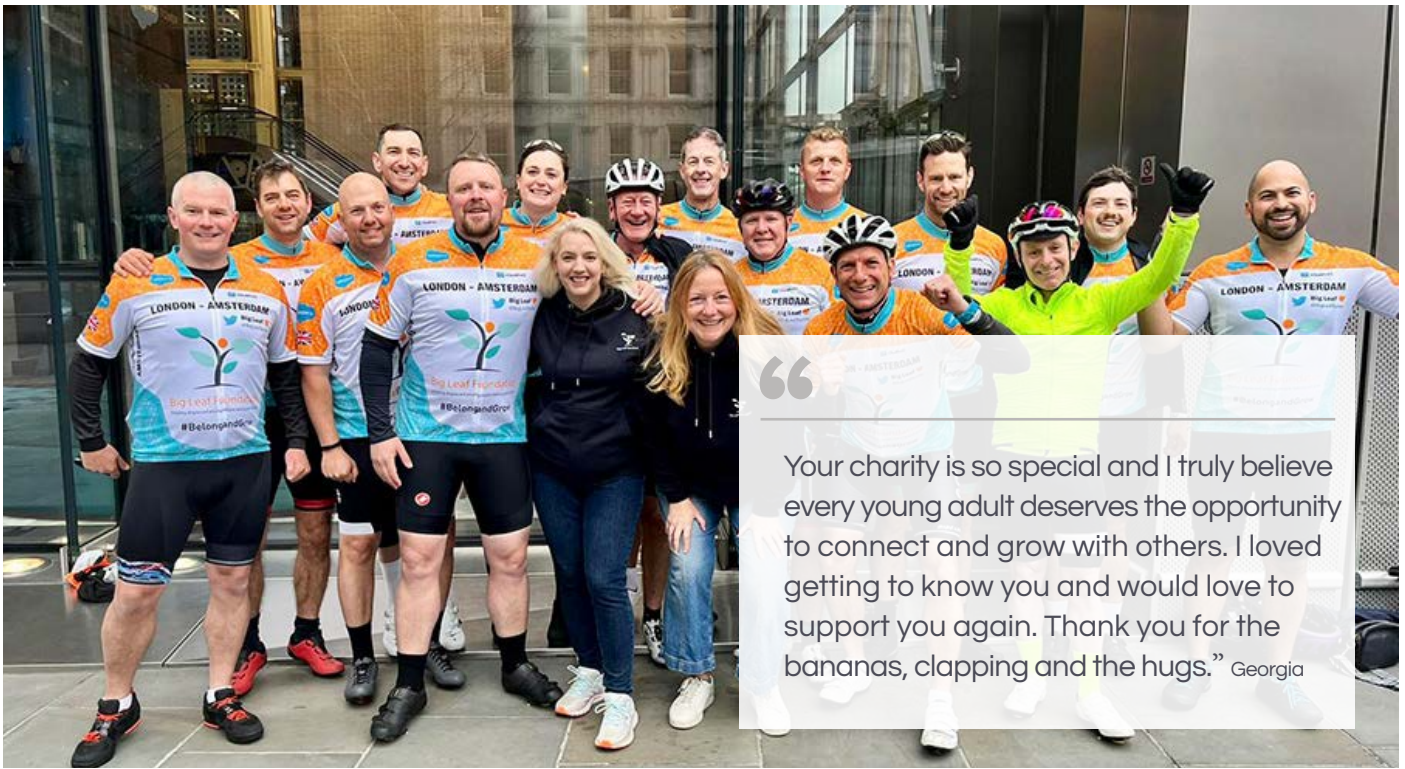
youth matters awards

Four of our graduates have been shortlisted for the national YMCA England & Wales Youth Matters Awards over the last two years, in recognition of their resilience, achievements and leadership.

These young people have become leaders within their own communities - providing support to other young people, making them feel welcome and helping them settle in. S also represented his YMCA group at a recent event with the local Mayor and other prestigious guests, sharing his experience as an asylum-seeker living in supported accommodation.

thank you

With thanks to **all of our Young Leaders**, past and present, for your brilliance, determination and constant care and support for others around you.



“Your charity is so special and I truly believe every young adult deserves the opportunity to connect and grow with others. I loved getting to know you and would love to support you again. Thank you for the bananas, clapping and the hugs.” Georgia

Image © Arun Sharma/TFA Limited

FUNDRAISING | supporters take up the challenge

One of our goals this year was to broaden our funding streams to include fundraising through sponsored events. We're grateful that our supporters have taken up the challenge. These individuals have raised vital funds to support our work.

salesforce charity bike ride

In June, 15 riders from Salesforce UK cycled from London to Amsterdam to raise money for Big Leaf. Covering around 350 miles over three days the team raised an impressive £16,084, enough to fund our English language school for a whole academic year.

One of the most significant barriers for young people arriving in the UK is a good understanding of English. Often people arrive as beginners in English speaking and reading, making it challenging to find their feet in their new communities.

These riders cycled to Dover before riding through France and Belgium, arriving in the Netherlands and eventually Amsterdam. Our Treasurer, Jocelyn, and Programmes Manager, Kayte, joined the support team and kept the riders motivated with stories of what their fundraising efforts would help achieve.

Many of the young people we support are eager to learn English. Thanks to these riders more young people than ever will be able access our English language programme.

twilight runway challenge

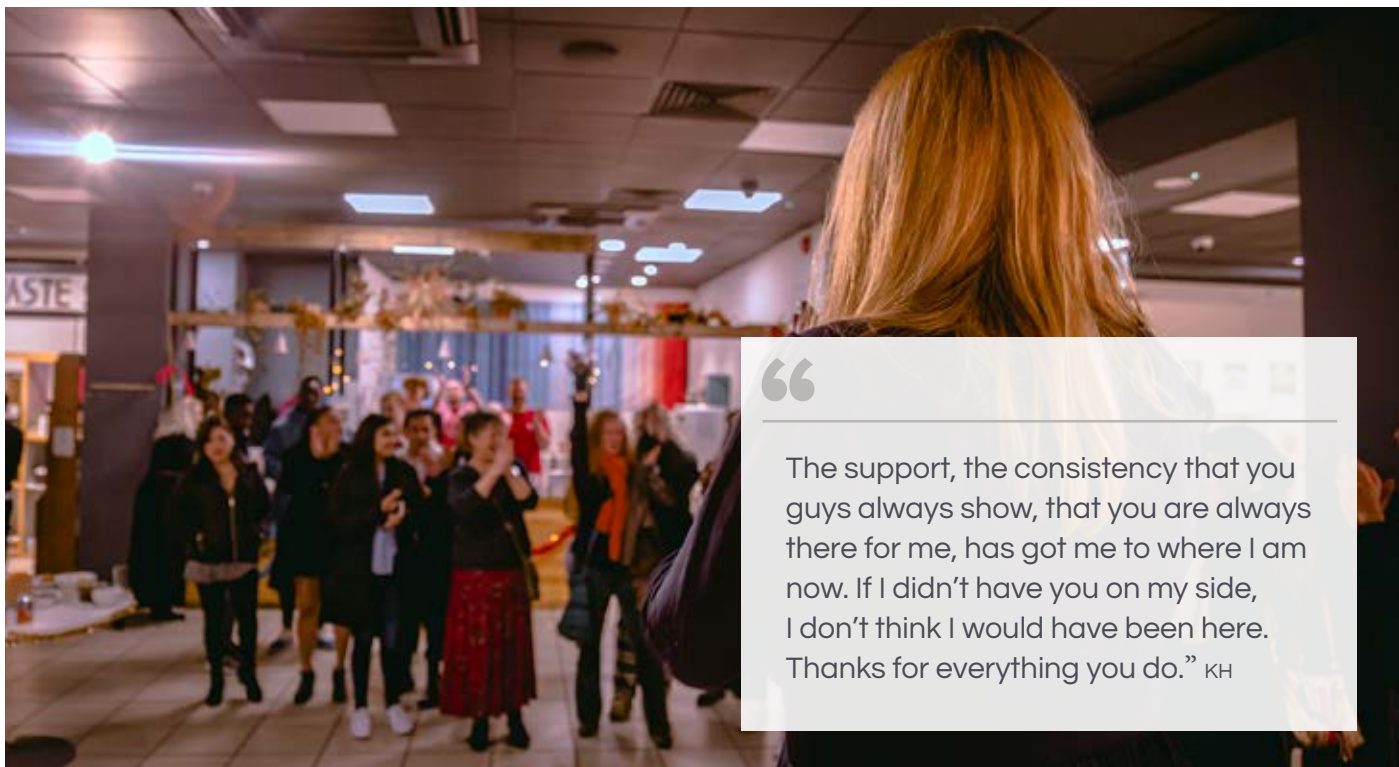
We were also one of the charity partners of the Twilight Runway Challenge. The challenge works with over 40 local charities. It takes place along Blackbushe airstrip, and participants can run, walk, cycle or scoot their way around the route and choose 3km, 5km or 10km loops.

Six Big Leaf staff, volunteers and supporters took part to raise money for Big Leaf and together raised £1,823 to support our projects. With demand for our services continuing to grow each year, we're exceptionally grateful to all those who participated and their sponsors.

funding milestone

This year, we also secured our first major multi-year core grant. Thanks to generous support from The National Lottery Community Fund, we now have three-year funding for our Programmes and Communications work and a Big Leaf office. We can plan with greater certainty and bolster our programme delivery.

“This funding will make a huge difference, allowing us to build our projects and community engagement. Having a permanent office space for the first time also means that young people can drop in and see us whenever they want and have a safe place they can anchor to when so much in their lives feels uncertain.” Vicki, Co-Founder



“

The support, the consistency that you guys always show, that you are always there for me, has got me to where I am now. If I didn't have you on my side, I don't think I would have been here. Thanks for everything you do.” KH

Image © Adi Detemo/Big Leaf Foundation

CELEBRATING FIVE YEARS | a huge milestone for our organisation

Big Leaf has grown from a single summer camp to year-round provision supporting displaced young people across Surrey. In December, we celebrated our five year anniversary with the community that has helped us each step of the way.

where it all began

In Summer 2017, our co-founders Vicki and Kayte took a group of 12 displaced young people on a residential trip to Trill Farm in Devon. Kayte was working in an FE college at the time and had seen first-hand the social isolation that many displaced students experienced during the long summer holiday. Together, and with the support of Elmbridge CAN, Trill Farm and social workers, they organised a week-long residential.

The week was transformative - for the young people, for Vicki and Kayte, and for the team at Trill. It was a chance to talk, build friendships, eat well, switch off from daily stressors and have fun. But it also showed what's possible when displaced young people are welcomed into a community and supported, and through this, the idea for Big Leaf was born.

624 individual young people supported since 2018

76 community & multiagency partners over five years

26 funders

80 volunteers giving their time supporting our young people

our community

Thanks to incredible and consistent support from multiple funders, partners and volunteers, we now provide a holistic programme of projects and activities throughout the year.

Our projects are designed to reduce social isolation and improve wellbeing for displaced young people and we are proud that with your help we have supported more than 600 young people over the last five years. Whether you were able to join us for our celebration event in December or not, we want to thank everyone who has played a part in getting us to where we are now. Community is at the heart of everything we do, thank you for being part of ours.

looking to the future

In an ideal world, charities like Big Leaf wouldn't need to exist. But while we are needed, we want to be able to support every displaced young person who asks for help - to walk alongside them until they have the confidence and friendships to see them into their future; and we want to do this with young people leading and our community at our side. Listen at <https://bit.ly/blf5years>

“

There are so many things I love about Big Leaf, but if I had to choose one, it would be that being in the company of such bravery, resilience, and determination every day just gives you so much hope at a time when I think hope is exactly what the world needs.” Kayte, Co-Founder

priorities for the year ahead

In December we marked our five-year anniversary and we've been reflecting on all that we have achieved in that time. But we're also looking to the future and as we grow, we're remain committed to ensuring that the voices of the young people we support are at the core of our work.

We know that listening to and learning from those with lived experience of forced displacement is essential to building meaningful projects. As we look to the year ahead, our priority is ensuring the voices and experiences of displaced young people continue to shape everything we do. We will deepen youth involvement in our organisational structure and build stronger connections with local schools and employers to create more opportunities for young people to thrive. Strengthening our governance structures and sharing our learning with others will help us to expand our impact and support even more young people as they navigate life in the UK. Our focus remains on building a community where young people are empowered to lead and have the support they need to succeed.

“

You give us opportunities and ideas and you look out for us. You accept people for who they are without exception. You make us feel like we can have a normal life.” R

“

We want to build networks and share our opinions to be useful to others.” R, Youth Ambassador

youth leadership

We already take our lead from the young people we support in almost all areas of our work. One aim of our leadership programmes is to support young people to develop the confidence and skills to speak out on the issues that matter to them. For some this means advocating for themselves or becoming leaders within their communities. For others, it has meant sharing their ideas within Big Leaf - about what we do well and how we could improve. Often the most effective organisations are not those who have one or two people with 'lived experience' on the board but instead have a culture of listening. As we look to the year ahead we'll explore how to further embed youth voice within Big Leaf, for example, by creating a youth advisory board.

building communities

This is at the heart of what we do and we will continue our focus on partnerships as a means to building supportive communities. We know that to achieve our vision of a community where displaced young people are welcomed and valued we need strong connections with the people around us. But not just at an organisational level, we also need to create space for young people from both displaced and local youth communities to meet, to connect and to build friendships, on equal footing. This is already a core part of many of our projects but over the coming year we will pursue new partnerships with local schools and youth communities to create more opportunities for connection through sports and education.

“

I enjoyed playing basketball, meeting new people and making friends from different backgrounds.” N



We want to encourage other organisations to work like Big Leaf.” S, Youth Ambassador

opportunities for progression

One of the biggest barriers to anyone trying to resettle in the UK is a good understanding of English and all of our programmes are designed around building English skills. But it can also be difficult for the young people we support to access work experience or find paid employment even once their English is at the right level, and more and more young people are asking for help with this. Our casework team and our Young Leaders Mentors have been doing some great work supporting young people to access opportunities. But we want to do more. Over the coming year we will seek out new partnerships with local employers and build our volunteer capacity to research local work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.

sharing our approach

The young people we support often express how much our work means to them. Over the last six years we've learnt so much about what works and what doesn't. We've listened to our young people and collaborated with partners to develop projects that help meet the changing needs of displaced young people in our community. We're still learning. But we also recognise our experience in this space and its potential for broader application; and we want to share our approach with others to increase support for displaced young people in Surrey and beyond. Over the coming year we will work with project partners and our new ambassadors to share our learning and approach with more organisations.



I have completed my work experience... it was great. I learned a lot and wish it was longer than a week.” K

governance structures

We celebrated our five-year anniversary in December. It gave us a chance to reflect on our achievements but also to think about how we have changed and grown in that time... and as we look to our future we want to ensure we have the right governance structures in place to take us through the next five years. Over the coming year, we will review our governance model and consider new approaches that embrace fresh ideas and perspectives but also continue to build on the incredible experience within our current team, our youth network and our volunteer community.

speaking up and speaking out

We know that young people with experience of forced displacement are best placed to speak about the challenges they face. Through our new ambassadors programme we'll empower young people to share their experiences – seeking opportunities to amplify their voices through media engagement and public events. Co-creation will be at the heart of our communications and campaigns work, and this means making joint decisions with our ambassadors about which opportunities we pursue; and what our focus should be in that space.



We want to encourage other refugees and asylum speakers to speak out.” N, Youth Ambassador

governance, structure & management

Big Leaf Foundation is controlled by its Constitution incorporated on 14 July 2018. It was recognised as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) on 14 December 2018 (UK Registered Charity Number 1181180) whose only voting members are its charity trustees ('Foundation' model constitution). The charity is run by the Board of Trustees who are responsible for ensuring the charity has a clear vision, mission and strategic direction and is focused on achieving these.

appointment of trustees

Any person over the age of 16 who is willing to act as a trustee, and has not been disqualified from acting as a trustee by virtue of sections 178 -180 of the Charities Act 2011 (or any statutory re-enactment or modification of that provision), may be appointed to be a trustee by a decision of the trustees.

There must be at least three trustees and a maximum of eight. Apart from the first trustees, every trustee is appointed for a term of two to three years, by a resolution passed at a properly convened meeting of the trustees.

Retiring trustees are eligible for reappointment. But a trustee who has served for three consecutive terms may not be reappointed for a fourth but may be reappointed after an interval of at least one year. In selecting individuals for appointment as trustees, the trustees consider the skills, knowledge and experience needed for the effective administration of the CIO.

Big Leaf Foundation's trustees include business and charitable sector professionals with experience in refugee care, youth work, education, finance, project management, IT, fundraising and communications.

Big Leaf Foundation is committed to the ongoing professional development of its trustees and their knowledge is kept up to date through internal and external training, knowledge sharing with partner organisations, academic reading and regular participation in project team meetings.

The trustees meet once a month. We ask our trustees to attend a minimum of two Big Leaf Foundation projects per year as we strongly believe this contributes to a better understanding of our organisation, how we work and the young people we support. All trustees are DBS checked at an enhanced level and Safeguarding and Prevent trained.

The Programme Managers report on the operational plan at trustee meetings. Big Leaf Foundation has a Safeguarding Sub Committee that meets to discuss safeguarding and review and update safeguarding policies and processes as needed. This committee includes the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), Deputy DSLs and two trustees.

The trustees have delegated authority to the Programme Managers with clear limitations. The Chair and the Programme Managers also have regular meetings to discuss operational matters and resource needs.

our team

Our team includes refugee care and migration studies experts, experienced youth workers, volunteers with lived experience of forced displacement and finance, project management, fundraising and communications specialists.

www.bigleafaffoundation.org.uk/about

risks & mitigations

Our trustees have identified ongoing risks around safeguarding and fundraising. But there are also continuing risks from government policies and a growing threat from the far-right which impact our work.

safeguarding

Risk | Failure to recognise and respond to safeguarding concerns, resulting in harm to the young people we support or others.

Mitigation | Safeguarding is embedded in Big Leaf and all staff and volunteers receive safeguarding training through our safeguarding partner, SafeCIC, as part of their induction and every two years thereafter. We have a range of policies in place to support good practice, including safeguarding, health and safety, lone working and codes of conduct for staff, volunteers and beneficiaries. Big Leaf also has a Safeguarding sub-committee that meets once a fortnight to discuss safeguarding and update policies and processes as needed. We're working with more young people than ever before. In recognition of this and to ensure we have sufficient capacity to monitor and respond to all safeguarding concerns, we have two Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads (in addition to our DSL) and two trustees on the sub-committee to oversee and provide support with safeguarding.

refugee rights

Risk | Government policies undermine the rights and entitlements of the young people we support, impacting their mental health and increasing stress levels of our staff.

Mitigation | We step into a campaigning space to speak up for the rights and entitlements of the young people we support. To oppose the inhumane policies of the Illegal Migration Bill and Rwanda Bill, we work closely with like-minded organisations. Big Leaf is a member of the Together with Refugees coalition and the Refugee and Migrant Children's Consortium. We attend regular sector-wide briefings on current policy and changes in the asylum system. We engage with MPs at a local level on individual cases where a young person is at risk. Through our communications work, leadership programmes and community partnerships, we aim to build broad support for a fairer, kinder and more effective asylum process. Our programmes continue to focus on health and wellbeing and supporting resilience for the young people we support. We also provide clinical supervision for all front-line staff.

fundraising

Risk | Insufficient funds to maintain current services, meet growth in demand or achieve our objectives.

Mitigation | Our Chair and Treasurer take an active role in fundraising and major donor relationships. Our Programme Managers also prepare funding applications relevant to their projects and we have a new part-time fundraiser supporting with grant writing. In 2018/2019 Big Leaf was reliant on two main funders for most of its income. We now receive funding from multiple trusts and organisations and for the first time ever we have secured large multi-year core funding. We believe in building strong relationships with our donors. We achieve this through regular communication, detailed reporting and providing opportunities to see first-hand what their support is helping us achieve. This focus on donor relationships has helped us retain funders and forward plan with confidence. But as demand for our services continues to grow, we're also increasing fundraising from individual donors and through sponsored events.

rise of the far-right

Risk | Hostile environment leads to increase in far-right activities, posing a direct threat and risk of harm to the young people we support and/or our team.

Mitigation | We work closely with organisations specialising in the risk posed by the far-right, including Hope Not Hate and SafeCST. These organisations monitor the risk from far-right groups, guide our risk management policies and update us on far-right action in our local area. We're also supporting young people in understanding their rights and UK law. Through close working with Surrey Police, we aim to build mutual trust and understanding between officers and local displaced communities so that the young people we support feel able to report hate crimes. With the support of Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum, we're advocating for our young people, ensuring that appropriate action is taken when a hate crime is reported. We also create the space to have difficult conversations with our young people about how to respond and keep themselves safe when targeted by the far right.

finance & accounts

Big Leaf Foundation is a registered charity and relies on donations from both trusts and individuals to continue its work.

We're fortunate and grateful to have the constant support of individual donors who give to us each month. We have also welcomed new funders this year alongside those who have supported us for the fourth or fifth year running.

We received our first large multi-year core grant from The National Lottery Community Fund for staff costs and a new office base for our team and young people; and multi-year funding from BBC Children in Need (to start in April 2024) which will fund our sports provision for under 18s.

This combination of multi-year core funding and regular and repeat donors helps us to forward plan with confidence. But we remain committed to making these grants and donations stretch as far as we can, so that we can support as many young people as possible. With this in mind, we continue to review our return as part of each project planning cycle to ensure it meets our standards.

Our huge thanks to all of our donors for your support. Together you're helping us to support more young people than ever before.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES | for year ended March 2024

income

Trusts & Grants	£178,692
Individual Donations	£143,513
Gift Aid & Interest	£2,613

total

£324,819

BROUGHT FORWARD from FY23 (ending March 2023)

General Fund	£9,748
Restricted Funds	£170,686
Total brought forward	£180,434

expenditure

Core Costs	£23,223
Staff Costs	£134,056
Project costs	£131,832

total

£289,112

CARRIED FORWARD to FY25 (ending March 2025)

General Fund	£5,475
Restricted Funds	£210,665
Total brought forward	£216,140

Our accounts have been independently reviewed by a Chartered Accountant in line with the guidance of the Charity Commission. For the sixth year since becoming a registered charity we will report clean accounts with no guidance or concerns.

The independent auditor's report will be available on our website in the coming months and added to this review and republished.

restricted funds

Our staff are currently engaged as self-employed contractors rather than employees. In order to ensure we have funding allocated to secure their services during the year, we hold the funds for each role within a restricted fund.

We also use our restricted fund model to hold funding gifted by grants or donations allocated to specific programmes. This allows us to account and report more easily on our expenditure for a programme against a grant.

project name and/or funder	purpose
Active Surrey Basketball & Boxing	Funding for our basketball programme and to trial a new boxing programme in response to direct requests from young people.
Anon. (private donor) Staff Costs	Funding for Governance, Partnerships and Admin Coordinator.
Blgrave Trust The Listening Fund Youth leadership	Multiyear funding for the continuation of our Young Leaders programme and improving our listening work.
Bennelong Foundation Practical English	One-off grant to support out practical English sessions.
Community Foundation for Surrey Core, translation costs & care leaver	Unrestricted funding to progress multiple areas of work; funding for essential translation services and new care-leaver project funding.
High Sheriff Youth Award Summer School	Funding for our Summer School programme.
Salesforce Practical English	Match funding for our summer Challenge Bike Ride in support of our English language programme.
Surrey County Council & DfE Numeracy & life skills programme	Funding for our new Food Counts programme aimed at improving numeracy and life skills for young people over 19.
Surrey Virtual School Education & enrichment	Partnership funding to support UASC with education and enrichment activities including our Summer Camp with Jamie's Farm.
The National Lottery Staff costs & office lease	Multi-year core funding from The National Lottery Community Fund for Programmes Manager & Comms Coordinator and new office.
Tides Foundation Ben & Jerry's Ambassadors programme	Funding for our new Ambassadors programme, launching in April 2024.
Tresanton Trust Casework, hub & translation services	Year four of a grant, providing funding for our two part-time caseworkers and our weekly drop-in service.
Twelve Healers & Healing Herbs Ltd Staff costs	Funding for staff costs.

Our aim this year was to broaden our funding streams for both projects and core costs while also exploring general fundraising through sponsored challenge events. We have made significant progress on both – with new multi-year core funders and two successful fundraising events (p27) giving us greater financial stability.

Thanks to support from our local community we have also increased the number of monthly donors and one-off donations. Over the coming year we will continue to seek new funding as we mature the shape of our organisation. Our focus on growth is solely to allow us to meet the growing demand for our services and support more young people.

thank you

We'd like to thank everyone who has worked with us this year. From our funders to our brilliant team of volunteers – we couldn't have done it without you.

donors

- Active Surrey
- Aristar Consulting
- Bennelong Foundation
- Blagrave Trust (Listening Fund)
- Ben & Jerry's Foundation (Tides)
- Community Foundation for Surrey
- Co-op Community Fund
- High Sheriff of Surrey
- Holy Trinity & St Mary's Church
- John Lewis Partnership
- Salesforce
- Shah Jahan Mosque
- Surrey County Council & DfE
- Surrey Football Association
- Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum
- Surrey Police (Chief Constable's charity of the year)
- Surrey Virtual School
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- Tresanton Trust
- Twelve Healers Trust & Healing Herbs

We'd also like to thank all of the individuals who give regularly throughout the year but are too many to name individually.

partners

- Aristar Consulting | Paul Glynn
- Basketball4All | Bridget Hayward & Creon Raftopoulos
- BBC Radio Surrey
- Chelsea Foundation | Rob Wright
- Child and Adult Mental Health Surrey | Vicky Lord
- Couchman Hanson Solicitors | Alex Couchman
- Elmbridge CAN | Jeannie Tweedie & team
- Guildford United Football Club | Colin Deans
- Guildford Shakespeare Company | Eli Murton
- Holy Trinity & St Mary's Guildford | Chloe, Corinne & Simon
- Jamie's Farm | Sam Maynard & team
- Merstham Cricket Club | Rich Feist
- Redhill Amateur Boxing Club | Alex Moore & Rehan
- Reigate Priory Cricket Club | James Stringer
- South London Refugee Association
- South Nutfield Cricket Club | James Paulett
- Surrey Arts | Jim Pinchen & team
- Surrey Football Association | Rob Bryant
- Surrey Outdoor Learning & Development | Ben Rayner
- Surrey Police | So many officers but esp. Supt Debbie Crouch, Ch Insp Dallas McDermott, PC Phil Jebb & DC Paul Tyson
- Surrey Sports Park | Carly Pearson
- Surrey University School of Law & WPO | Jessica Mathew & the law students, Liz Williams & Thamsin Young
- Surrey Virtual School | Cass Hardy, Nadia Mughal & Lisa Smith
- The HEART Centre | Wendy Firmin-Price & the team
- The Hummingbird Project | Elaine Ortiz
- The Kennedy Club & St George's College | Jon Carr
- Together with Refugees Coalition & IMix
- Woking Mosque | Kawther Hasmi and Imam Hashmi
- Woking People of Faith | Simon Trick and Keith Scott

volunteers

- Abdulsalam
- Toby Athersuch
- Mimi Auty
- Martin Bangs
- Annabel Boyle
- Jaego & Jessame Cable
- Richard Cable
- Alfie Carter
- Denise Cassar
- Alexandra Colbert
- Alison Craze
- Hannah Dirks
- Antonin Ficatier
- Paul Glynn
- Kavyan H
- Sabir H
- Ella Hood
- Sofia Janjua
- Richard Leighton
- Ash Mall
- Jessica Mall
- Jane Manfield
- Chris Richards
- Scarlett Somerville

core team

- Akira Takenaka
- Naoe Takenaka
- Randy T
- Nikki Triffitt
- Henry Woods
- Hannah Zander
- Daud Afzal
- Abby Auty
- Evie Booton
- Kayte Cable
- Ro Carter
- Vicki Felgate
- Koye Sofoluwe

trustees

- Vicki Felgate
- Dave Wagstaff
- Katie Wilson
- Jocelyn Zanasi

support us

We can only achieve our aims with your help. Your support will mean that displaced young people in Surrey will be able to rediscover their potential and find their place in the local community.

donate

Your money will help to fund projects that combat social isolation and improve wellbeing among young refugees and asylum seekers in Surrey.

www.bigleaffoundation.org.uk/support-us

partner with us

We work with a growing network of organisations and individuals to develop projects that will inspire our young people. If you have a project idea that you'd like to talk to us about please email

contact@bigleaffoundation.org.uk

volunteer

We're a small and dedicated team, determined to support and empower displaced young people. If this sounds like something you want to help us achieve please get in touch.

contact@bigleaffoundation.org.uk

keep in touch

Follow us on social media for the latest news, campaigns and updates.

[@BigLeafSurrey](https://www.instagram.com/BigLeafSurrey)



Image © Vicki Felgate/Big Leaf Foundation

“

All your young people... are a real credit to you. They give me renewed hope for the future of our world, knowing that you have given them the tools to make a positive difference in the world.

Rebecca Bowden
Community Foundation for Surrey

”



Recipient of the **Surrey High Sheriff Youth Award 2022**
Surrey Police **Chief Constable's Charity** of the year 2023

Big Leaf Foundation, PO Box 1544, Woking, GU24 8UH
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UK Registered Charity Number 1181180