

Guildford Philanthropy

Newsletter February 2026



The Chairman's Letter

Welcome to the first Guildford Philanthropy newsletter of 2026.

December is usually a month of excess for many – whether that's measured by the quantity of gifts given - and received - or the overindulgence in food and drink at the various festivities and celebrations attended. But, as sure as night follows day (apologies for the cliché), January usually brings us back to earth with a bit of a bump. Ignoring the mood-hoover of dry January and the anything but dry February, the changing geopolitical landscape, and indeed events closer to home, have made the start of the year seemingly bumpier than ever; the soundbites that came out of Davos and the continuous daily doom-garnering headlines do little to assuage our concerns and the stock markets fluctuate in excitement or fear.

None of this creates a stable fiscal environment for business but makes it even harder for charities who need to support an ever-increasing number of people in need.

We may not be able to do anything on a macro level, but we can do something closer to home by looking after and supporting people in our community; I'm not saying that we can make every day Christmas Day, but I do know that every little helps and we are very grateful to all our Corporate Ambassadors for the support they gave us during 2025. We look forward to working with them further during 2026 to ensure Guildford can be a place of which we can be proud and where people are treated equally and given opportunities.

In this newsletter we report on the last event of 2025 and the latest grants we awarded in January, and we have feedback from some of the charities and organisations we supported last year.

Let's hope there are better outcomes on the geopolitical front as the year progresses but at home let's do as much as we can to help those in need who live here in Guildford.

Thank you again for your support.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nikki Ackerley'.



Nikki Ackerley, Chair

Working together to support our Community



Nikki (centre) with GP panel members Marc Clancy and Andy Crossley with Kate Peters (L) from CFS and Zöe Franklin MP

Seeing The Year Out In Style

We marked the start of the Christmas festivities with a Drinks & Canapes reception at The Lighthouse in Guildford where we were not only able to celebrate with many of our Ambassadors but were also delighted to welcome Zöe Franklin, MP for Guildford.

Thanks also went to our hosts Rebecca and Erik Jespersen, founders of The Lighthouse, who explained how their organisation helps

people of all ages in Guildford through a range of creative projects to support, encourage and empower anyone who finds themselves in need. They also told us how the £10,000 grant given by Guildford Philanthropy – and funded in no small part by the generosity of our Corporate Ambassadors - helped over 400 families last Christmas.



Our Grant Update

Last month the Guildford panel met to award two more grants which brings the total number, since Guildford Philanthropy was founded, to 85. Since those early beginnings, over £570,000 has been given to Guildford-based charities, organisations and social enterprises.

The latest two grants were awarded to The Matrix Trust and to Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership.

Our grant of £5,705 to Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership (SLLP) will enable the expansion of their Digital Skills project to Guildford residents. Based on demonstrable evidence of the inequalities in digital access and skills for communities which experience high levels of unemployment and/or deprivation, SLLP will focus on using IT to build skills, confidence and open access to new opportunities that supports them to be socially connected.

The Matrix Trust provides a lifeline for vulnerable people across Guildford Borough and in 24/25 supported 1,558 young people. This latest grant of £3,200 from Guildford Philanthropy will help fund a youth development group that will work to empower individuals experiencing additional challenges such as neurodiversity, to improve their life chances.



Nikki and Dan Setterfield, CEO of The Matrix Trust

At the tail end of last year, I had the pleasure of visiting The Matrix Trust and its CEO Dan Setterfield. Set within the Allen House Grounds, it's a haven for young people who come here to attend workshops, mentoring sessions and various youth activities. The Matrix Trust supports thousands of young people in Guildford's schools and neighbourhoods to help them make the most of their lives and become active citizens, benefiting them personally and our communities and society more widely. Matrix provides mentoring, safe spaces and opportunities to build confidence and empower everyone who comes through the doors.

Thanks again to our Ambassadors for helping us to help them



Exploring The Arts In A Safe And Secure Environment

I wanted to grab a paintbrush this month when I visited ArtVenture Trust, based at St Peter's School in Mero where I was greeted by a sea of artistry! A creative day centre for adults with learning disabilities, physical impairments and autism, it allows vulnerable people to explore the visual arts in a safe and secure environment. Creative and social skills, self-confidence and independence are developed in a positive and supportive atmosphere with help and support provided by artworkers and volunteers.

I met AV's Manager, Mariann Kehrling and Trustee, Paul Charlesworth who showed me the extensive range of visual arts which are embraced including painting, textiles, ceramics, sculpture, mixed media and photography. ArtVenture holds 56 sessions a week across their two studios – the other is at Gosden House - and are currently helping 45 artists, some attending weekly but some twice or even three times a week from 9am to 2.30pm. It's open circa 40 weeks a year but during school breaks there are also special workshops.

Mariann explained that ArtVenture looks to alleviate the social exclusion and

isolation suffered by adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities:

“Working in small groups and giving one-to-one attention where necessary, our activities are designed to improve self expression, develop potential and encourage a greater awareness of self-worth coupled with a real sense

of achievement. Many of our participants live in sheltered accommodation so by coming to Artventure they can meet and make new friends. Their carers and parents can have much needed respite knowing they are being well looked after.”

Guildford Philanthropy recently granted £7,000 to help fund core costs.



Nikki with AV Trustee Paul Charlesworth



ArtVenture is a creative day centre for adults with learning disabilities, physical impairments and autism



Bringing theatre to deaf children

The Yvonne Arnaud Theatre's Creative Learning Programme involved ten SEND pupils in a dynamic, inclusive arts project

The Yvonne Arnaud Theatre's Creative Learning Programme continues to widen access to the arts for underrepresented and marginalised groups across Surrey. Through targeted outreach, inclusive workshops, and funded opportunities, the programme removes barriers for children, young people, and isolated adults to engage creatively and meaningfully with the arts.

In 2024–25, Guildford Philanthropy awarded a grant of £4,000 to YAT's Discover Theatre project that provided ten deaf students with special educational needs and disabilities, the opportunity to participate in a dynamic, inclusive arts project based at the theatre. In addition to their teacher, they had a guest artist, the deaf actor Ciaran O'Brien. When asked what they enjoyed the most, the children said:

'going backstage and seeing the changing rooms', 'standing on stage' and perhaps the best comment from one: 'I enjoyed everything'. The children also reported feeling more confident, happier and enjoying learning something new, sharing their ideas and having the chance to be creative.

By the end of the project, their teacher reported that pupils eagerly anticipated sessions, confidently used new vocabulary and demonstrated enhanced social and emotional skills. Their exposure to a deaf role model had a profound effect on their understanding of deaf identity.

David Beal, YAT's Director of Development said: "Discover Theatre 2024–25 was a meaningful, impactful project that not only supported SEND pupils in achieving their Arts Award Explore, but also gave them a sense of identity, belonging, and pride. It created a ripple effect throughout the school and broader community, demonstrating how inclusive arts education can transform lives. We are deeply grateful to Guildford Philanthropy for your generous support of this project."



Supporting Refugees

A grant of £2,000 was awarded to Big Leaf Foundation to support their Refugee Week activities; through a series of workshops and events, this UK-wide festival celebrated the



contributions, creativity and resilience of refugees and people seeking sanctuary. At one of the workshops 15 young people were invited to work with Iraqi artist, photojournalist and filmmaker, Ali Arkady, to create an exhibition that explored the theme of 'Our Home'. After choosing images, they were then taught how to transfer them onto stone after which the artworks were displayed at St Mary's Church in Guildford during Refugee Week which attracted over 200 visitors.

At other events over 85 young people came together through seven-a-side football tournament and basketball sessions which provided a chance for displaced young people to play sport together and build connections.

"We are incredibly grateful to Guildford Philanthropy. Refugee Week is the perfect opportunity to bring people together across language and cultural divides and celebrate what it means to be a community, but we can only do this with the support of our funders. Thank you for making such an incredible week possible."

Vicki Felgate, Chair of Big Leaf Foundation

Providing a Listening Ear

Guildford Town Centre Chaplaincy provides a non-judgemental, caring, listening and supportive presence for anyone who lives, works or visits Guildford. A grant from Guildford Philanthropy of £13,000 has enabled them to continue to meet demand for chaplains and fund a new part-time project coordinator. In the last few months chaplains have been introduced to Zero Community Fridge, two new GP surgeries, St Lukes and Fairlands, and for the staff at Experience Guildford and Wetherspoons. Coming from all walks of life, they give a couple of hours each week



Susanna Hoar, Guildford Town Centre Chaplaincy

and spend time with staff, patients or clients depending on the placement, listening without judgement in a safe and confidential space. Susanna Hoar, on behalf of the Chaplaincy said: "As recognition of the need for wellness in the workplace increases, so does demand for our chaplains. Thanks to

this funding, we now have a dedicated coordinator recruiting and supervising our growing team of chaplains, and have been able to recruit a dedicated volunteer who has recently retired as a GP, to specifically manage the growing GP chaplaincy team. This has allowed us to concentrate on other areas of the chaplaincy, securing more placements in different sectors, increasing recruitment and raising the project's profile. As a result, many more people in Guildford will now benefit from the chaplains' caring presence, listening ear and the safe, confidential spaces they provide."

Supporting the Canterbury Care Centre Sewing Initiative

In December 2024 a grant was awarded to the Canterbury Care Centre, a drop-in centre in Guildford for people with mental health needs,

following The Mistletoe Ball, an event co-hosted by Guildford Philanthropy and the then Mayor of Guildford, Councillor Sallie Barker. The grant enabled The Canterbury Care Centre to start a sewing group at the start of 2025, as well as funding the purchase of a gazebo and professional publicity material.

The initiative is led by a talented and recently retired seamstress, and the sessions

are so popular there is a waiting list for 2026. The group learns hand sewing skills as well as machine work, and has been involved in making bags, make-up bags, pencil cases and cushion covers among other things.

Most importantly, the social aspect and the conversations of the group have added tremendous value and have been greatly enjoyed by the members.



The Canterbury Care Centre started its popular sewing group using its grant funding.

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Join us in making a difference



Email
nikki@guildfordphilanthropy.org.uk



Website
www.guildfordphilanthropy.org.uk



Telephone*
01483 478092

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