



“Working with communities
to learn how to serve them best”

2024/25

ANNUAL REPORT



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Statement from our Managing Director

"As I reflect on the past year, I am both humbled and proud of the resilience and determination displayed by Sporting Communities in the face of ongoing national and global challenges. While the national financial climate has presented significant hurdles, our commitment to delivering high-quality, impactful programmes has remained unwavering. Despite the continued pressures faced by communities across the country, we have successfully met the ambitious goals we set for ourselves, continuing to serve with excellence.

Our core values have been the foundation of our strength during this time. The dedication and integrity of our team have enabled us to navigate uncertainty and ensure that the most vulnerable and underrepresented members of society receive the support and opportunities they deserve. We've worked tirelessly to maintain our focus on delivering services that have a real, lasting impact, demonstrating that even in difficult times, our mission to create positive change remains strong.



Looking ahead to 2025/26, we are excited to explore new ways of investing in the communities we serve. We recognise the need for innovation in our approach to community development, and we are committed to finding sustainable solutions that will continue to empower those who need it most. We remain determined to build on the momentum we've generated, forging new partnerships and seeking creative avenues for growth, all while staying true to our vision of a brighter and more inclusive tomorrow.

Thank you to our partners, our supporters, and to the communities we serve for your continued trust and engagement. Together, we will navigate the challenges ahead and continue to make a positive difference."

Ben Rigby (Managing Director)

Key statistics of 2023/24

731 positive activities delivered

[Click here to learn more about us](#)

1,305 hours of engagement delivered

2,884 different people engaged on projects

21,926 throughput of direct engagement

15,059 throughput community use of our assets

£4 million total invested into community services

Case Study - Person

J first joined our project alongside his sister at a time when he was struggling with low confidence, poor mental health, and bullying at school. Initially quiet and withdrawn, he found it difficult to engage or feel safe in many social settings. However, from the moment he attended our sessions, he started to find a space where he felt accepted and supported.

Over time, J developed a strong passion for football, which became a key part of his journey towards improved wellbeing. Beyond just playing, he took an active interest in the running of the sessions—helping to organise activities, take registers, and even learn about risk assessments to ensure everyone's safety. This involvement helped him develop important skills and boosted his self-esteem. His growing confidence was further demonstrated when he joined a special trip to Kitlocker, where he collaborated in designing the Youth Innovation Conference t-shirts for 2025. This opportunity not only empowered him creatively but also connected him with a wider network of young people and professionals.



Currently, J is leading a social action project aimed at supporting his community, showing how far he has come from those early days of isolation and uncertainty. His journey highlights the positive impact of accessible, inclusive youth work and the value of combining sport with personal development.

J's mum shares, "It's been lovely to see his confidence grow, and I'm really proud of what he's achieved. Thanks for the support you've given him—it's made all the difference."

J continues to inspire both peers and adults alike, proving that with the right support, young people can overcome challenges and become agents of change.

Community engagement

Community services continue to be a core part of Sporting Communities' mission. Through sustained engagement with young people, we have seen a positive and measurable impact in all our areas of operation.

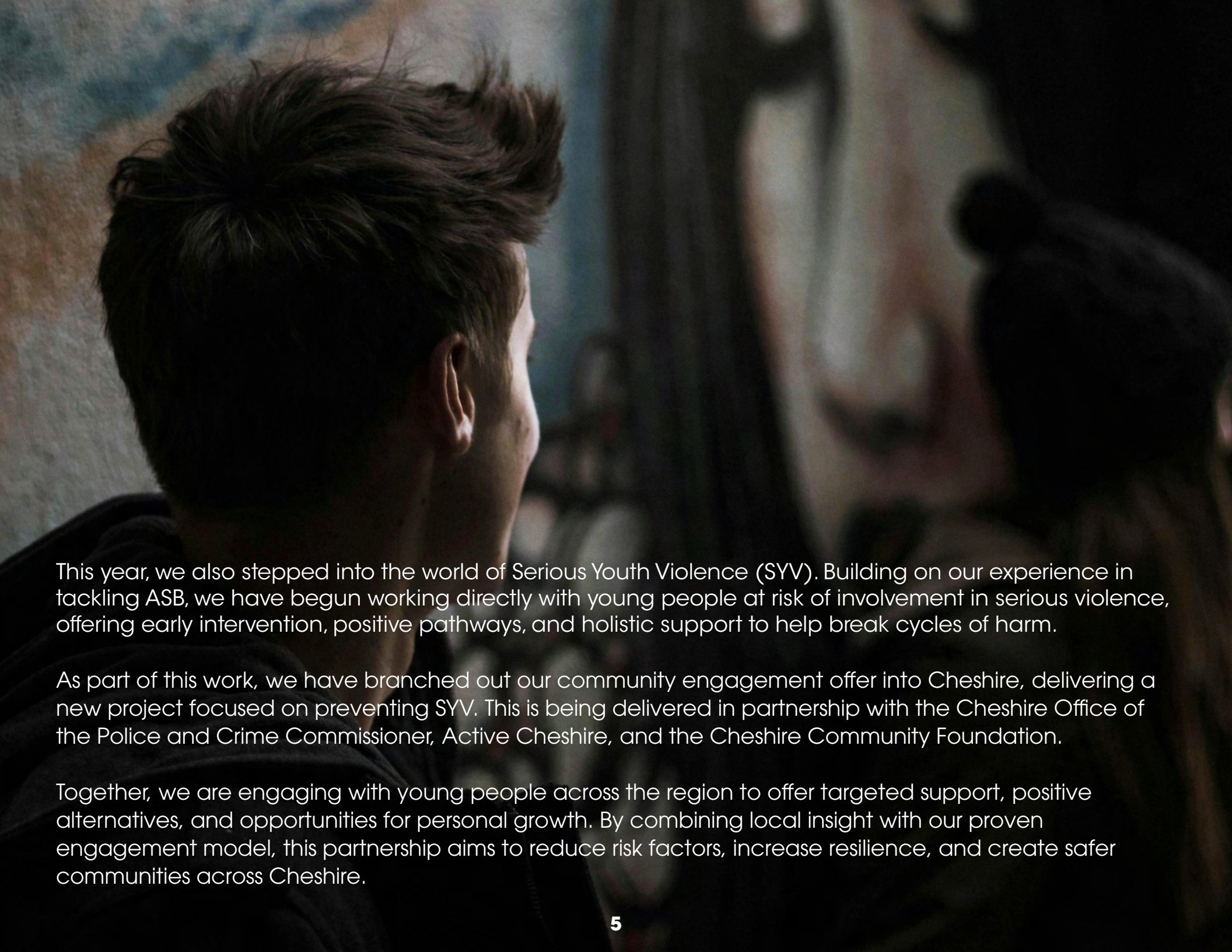
Over the past year, anti-social behaviour (ASB) has continued to decrease across the communities where we work. In areas where we have delivered multi-year programmes, ASB has fallen by a further average of 25%, reflecting the long-term benefits of consistent, targeted support.



Our community engagement focuses on creating safe spaces, building trusted relationships, and supporting young people's social development. This approach has not only reduced ASB but has also led to a significant increase in the number of young people demonstrating pro-social behaviours, including volunteering and peer mentoring. These young people are now playing an active role in supporting their peers and strengthening their communities.

***ASB FALLS BY AN AVERAGE OF 44% IN THE AREAS THAT
WE DELIVER PROJECTS FOR 2 YEARS***

AND BY A FURTHER 25% THE FOLLOWING YEAR.



This year, we also stepped into the world of Serious Youth Violence (SYV). Building on our experience in tackling ASB, we have begun working directly with young people at risk of involvement in serious violence, offering early intervention, positive pathways, and holistic support to help break cycles of harm.

As part of this work, we have branched out our community engagement offer into Cheshire, delivering a new project focused on preventing SYV. This is being delivered in partnership with the Cheshire Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Active Cheshire, and the Cheshire Community Foundation.

Together, we are engaging with young people across the region to offer targeted support, positive alternatives, and opportunities for personal growth. By combining local insight with our proven engagement model, this partnership aims to reduce risk factors, increase resilience, and create safer communities across Cheshire.

Youth Voice

Over the last year, we have significantly increased both the number and variety of opportunities for young people to share their thoughts, feelings, and opinions in meaningful and impactful ways. We've created more spaces where young people feel heard, valued, and able to influence the decisions that affect them — not just within our organisation, but across their communities.

A key focus this year has been helping young people connect with their peers to enhance their collective voice. Through workshops, forums, and peer-led activities, we've supported young people to share ideas, challenge each other, and work together on solutions. We've also actively encouraged and facilitated networking between youth voice groups from different localities. This is vital because it helps young people learn from diverse experiences, build confidence, and gain a broader understanding of the issues that affect their generation. Connecting across regions strengthens youth voice on a wider scale, turning local ideas into national conversations and ensuring that young people are driving change together. We've also supported Sport England with the development of their Youth Voice Group

Our work continues to show that when young people have the chance to collaborate, influence, and lead, real change happens; for them, their peers, and their communities.

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Youth Voice Groups

5

Social Action Projects

22

Young people speaking
at the Youth Innovation
Conference

***"IT WAS AMAZING. I NEVER THOUGHT
PEOPLE WOULD REALLY LISTEN TO
SOMEONE LIKE ME, BUT THEY DID,
AND IT MADE ME FEEL LIKE MY VOICE
ACTUALLY MATTERED."
(M, AGED 17)***



This year we were proud of our Managing Director who was awarded StreetGames' prestigious National Youth Voice Champion Award in recognition of his unwavering commitment to empowering young people. Through his leadership, youth voice has been embedded at the heart of our organisation, ensuring young people are not just heard, but actively shape decisions that affect them.

From co-designing community projects, to placing young people in advisory roles, his work has created a culture where youth perspectives drive real change. This award celebrates his dedication to breaking down barriers, fostering inclusivity, and proving that when young people lead, communities thrive.



[Click here to learn more](#)

Building on the success of the first year, the second Youth Innovation Conference brought together over 200 young people, professionals, and decision makers from across the UK. Once again hosted at University Academy 92, the event was proudly supported by the National Lottery Community Fund, Kitlocker and the Inspirational Learning Group, alongside other partners who all believe in the power of youth voice.

This year's conference featured inspiring keynote speakers, thought-provoking panel discussions, and interactive workshops — all co-designed and delivered by young people. Delegates explored how to turn ideas into action, how youth leadership can drive social change, and how genuine co-design can create lasting impact in communities.

With energy, creativity and determination, the 2024 Youth Innovation Conference continued to break new ground in putting young people at the heart of innovation and decision making.

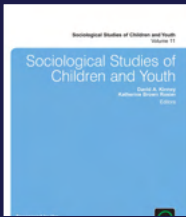




Research

At Sporting Communities, we are passionate about bridging the gap between theory and practice. That's why we actively collaborate with academic partners to share knowledge, promote best practice, and drive innovation across our sector. We're particularly proud that young people involved in our youth voice work have also contributed to this learning.

Below is a selection of articles, blogs, and presentations our team has contributed to, including journal abstracts and experience-based insights that reflect both professional and lived experience. Click the images to read the publication.



SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Volume 32. Spaces for play: intergenerational community development of an urban park in the East Midlands of England (L.Shaw)



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PLAYWORK PRACTICE

A Journey into Hybrid Play Space Approaches Within an Urban Context (R.Podyma)



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE NOW

Beyond Rocket Park: A transformative journey (R.Podyma)

Case Study - Programme



The Easter HAF programme in Tamworth delivered a significant positive impact on children and families during the school holidays. By providing free, nutritious meals and a variety of inclusive activities, the programme created a safe and engaging environment for participants.

The sessions included team sports, creative arts, group games, and healthy eating discussions, fostering physical wellbeing, self-expression, and teamwork. Many returning attendees highlighted the trusted relationships built with the staff, while parents praised the supportive atmosphere. One parent shared, "Thank you all, *M* loved her time with you all. When are you coming back?. This was a testament to the programme's success.

A key focus of the programme was inclusivity, particularly for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Staff were trained to adapt activities, create calm spaces, and maintain flexibility, ensuring every child could participate at their own pace. *S*, a returning attendee with Speech, Language, and Communication Needs, Severe Learning Difficulties, and ADHD, exemplified this inclusivity. Her confidence soared as she led group activities, even singing in front of others, showcasing the transformative power of an inclusive environment.



The 2025 Tamworth Easter HAF programme not only provided immediate benefits but also laid the foundation for long-term community growth and wellbeing.

Training and Workforce Development

As part of our ongoing commitment to staff and volunteer development, we have continued to upskill our team through our valued partnership with CIMSPA. This collaboration ensures our training aligns with national professional standards and reflects the evolving needs of the sector.

In addition, we delivered a number of Leadership courses to young people attending our youth and community sessions. These programmes are designed to build confidence, communication, and teamwork skills, empowering young people to take active roles in their communities.

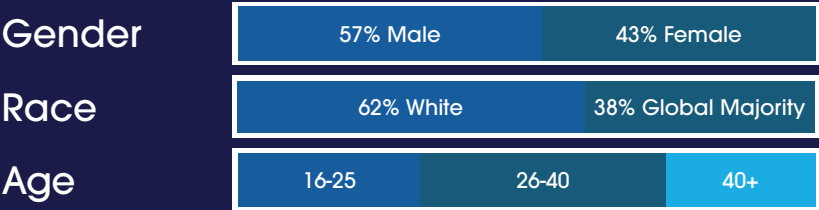
This year we also launched a new accredited course, Introduction to Youth Work, designed to retrain those already working in the field and support those new to the field, strengthening pathways into the profession. The Introduction to Youth Work training received full accreditation from CIMSPA; an important milestone that recognises the quality and impact of our approach.

Beyond internal development, we have remained actively involved in shaping the future of the community sports sector. Our team has contributed to CIMSPA’s professional standards for Community Sport and continues to collaborate with UK Coaching through their Coaching Advisory Panel and Diversity Expert Panel.

These efforts reflect our ongoing dedication to excellence, equity, and leadership in the fields of youth and community development.



Sporting Communities has an incredible workforce of passionate, driven, empathic individuals, who collectively make our fantastic team.



Breakdown of workers as they identify



"WORKING FOR SPORTING COMMUNITIES AS A YOUNG PERSON HAS BENEFITED ME HUGELY, IN REALISING THE IMPORTANCE OF RESPONSIBILITY, COMMUNITY AND SERVING OTHERS. IT HAS UNDOUBTEDLY TAUGHT ME VALUABLE LIFE LESSONS I'LL CARRY INTO THE FUTURE."

Facilities

Over the 2024/25 period, the facilities at Normanton Park have seen phenomenal levels of community engagement and use. The courts alone recorded a throughput of over 30,000 visits, reflecting their popularity and the positive impact of the investment. The revitalised community centre has also become a vital local hub, offering a welcoming and inclusive space for a wide range of activities and services.

We are especially grateful to Pilon and Rolls-Royce for their generous support in renovating the community centre. Their contributions, as part of their ongoing commitment to supporting local communities, have been instrumental in transforming the space into a vibrant, accessible, and multi-functional hub for residents. The centre proudly houses our sister charity, Supporting Communities, enabling targeted support for children and families with a variety of needs. As part of our shared commitment to reaching those most in need, we also transferred our mobile units to Supporting Communities, allowing them to expand their outreach and provide flexible, on-the-ground support for vulnerable families across the area.

In response to local demand, we have significantly increased our SEND, mental health and connectivity provision at the site, ensuring that the space is accessible and beneficial to all members of the community. These developments have only strengthened the role of the Normanton Park facilities as a cornerstone of local life. The community-led steering group, made up of local residents, partners, and facility users, continues to play a key role in guiding the future of these assets — ensuring they evolve in line with community needs and remain open, inclusive, and impactful for years to come.





As part of our commitment to community safety, we were proud to support an inspiring youth-led social action project tackling the critical issue of knife crime. Thanks to the incredible efforts of students from Derby College, a bleed control kit was installed at Normanton Park Community Centre, providing a potentially life-saving resource for the local area. It was truly uplifting to hear from such passionate young people determined to make a positive difference in their community.

Delivered in partnership with the Derby and Derbyshire Violence Reduction Unit, this project stands as a powerful example of collaboration in action. We would also like to extend our heartfelt thanks to UC Electrical for generously fitting the unit.

Environmental Impact

We are committed to minimising our environmental impact and promoting sustainability across all areas of our work. Over the past year, we've strengthened our efforts to embed environmentally responsible practices into our operations, projects, and partnerships.

We've made conscious changes in how we purchase and manage resources—opting for environmentally friendly equipment, reducing waste, and sourcing materials responsibly. An environmental assessment of our community assets has helped us further lower our carbon footprint through energy-efficient measures and better recycling systems. Regular activities such as litter picking and creating wildlife-friendly spaces are now a core part of our environmental approach, and we actively encourage staff and volunteers to adopt eco-friendly habits both on and off site.

As a direct response to the high volume of litter collected during our clean-up efforts last year, we partnered with Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing and Pinnacle Group to install a large recycling bin next to our courts. This has been a practical tool for educating the community about recycling, and since its installation in March, we've already recycled more than 18,000 plastic bottles.



We've also expanded our environmental education work, particularly through our Secret Garden initiative. Here, children and families learn about the importance of wildlife, biodiversity, and how ecosystems function—helping to foster a deeper connection with nature and a sense of responsibility for protecting it.

Through these actions, we aim to create a cleaner, greener environment and instil long-term environmental awareness within the communities we serve.

Case Study - Place

In Cheadle, the power of Youth Voice has driven meaningful change, starting with the successful development of a skate park. Young people were actively involved in consultations, sharing their ideas and priorities to shape a facility that met their needs. Their input ensured the skate park was not only well-designed but also a vibrant hub for social connection and physical activity. The project's success demonstrated the value of engaging young people in decision-making, proving that their perspectives lead to more inclusive and effective community spaces.

Building on this achievement, Youth Voice has now expanded into broader community planning. Young people are playing a key role in consultations for Section 106 land development plans, which aim to transform a local park into a dedicated space for youth. Their insights are shaping features such as multi-use sports areas, green spaces for relaxation, and safe, accessible layouts. By involving them in these discussions, the project ensures the park reflects what young people truly want, promoting ownership, pride, and long-term engagement.

The impact of Youth Voice extends beyond physical spaces. It has fostered a culture of collaboration between young people, local authorities, and planners, breaking down barriers and building trust. One participant shared, "It's amazing to see our ideas actually happen. It makes us feel heard."

Cheadle's approach highlights how empowering young people leads to better outcomes for everyone. From skate parks to park redevelopments, Youth Voice is proving to be an essential tool in creating communities where young people thrive.



Partnerships

Over the past year, Sporting Communities has significantly expanded its partnerships across the third sector and business community. Recognising the importance of collaborative working, we have proactively sought opportunities to connect with organisations that share our commitment to improving the lives of young people and strengthening communities.

In the business sector, we hosted a Marketing Derby Bondholders event to explore how we can work more effectively with local companies. This provided a valuable platform to showcase our work, share impact stories, and build new relationships with businesses keen to contribute to social good. We have continued to work with longstanding supporters such as Rolls Royce and Pilon, providing meaningful volunteer days for their staff, who have helped enhance our community facilities. In addition, we've connected with the Staffordshire and East Midlands Chambers of Commerce to expand our regional reach and open up opportunities for cross-sector collaboration.

Within the third sector, we are proud to be an active member of Cheshire West and Chester Voluntary Action's (CWVA) Children, Young People and Families Alliance and Derby City Youth Alliance. This has enabled us to contribute to strategic discussions, share best practice, and collaborate with like-minded partners working towards shared goals. At CWVA's annual conference, we delivered a well-received workshop on the power of community sport in engaging vulnerable young people, and we've taken part in their Marketplace events to promote services and forge stronger connections.

These expanded partnerships have been instrumental in helping us increase our reach, share resources, and build a broader support network for the young people and families we serve. By strengthening ties with both businesses and voluntary organisations, we are creating a joined-up approach to addressing youth disadvantage and driving long-term change.





This year, we were proud to support one of our team members to travel to Kenya in partnership with Port Vale FC Community Trust. Together, they worked to provide young children, many of whom face significant barriers to education and sport, with the opportunities they deserve.

As part of this international volunteering initiative, our staff member helped deliver fun, inclusive physical activities and supported local teachers in creating engaging, supportive learning environments. For many of the children, this was their first experience of structured sport and education, helping to build their confidence, teamwork, and sense of joy.

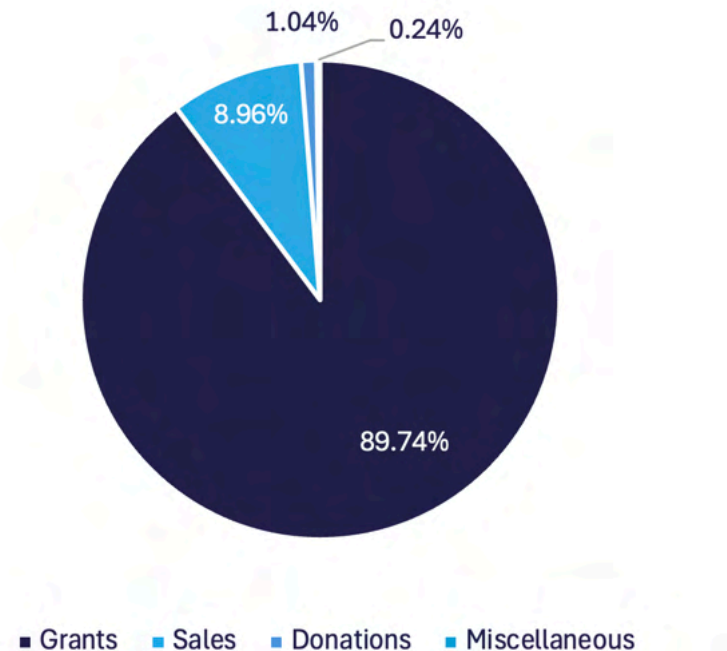
This experience not only made a lasting impact on the children and communities in Kenya, but also reflected our commitment to using sport and education as powerful tools for empowerment, both at home and internationally.

Finances

Throughout the year, we took significant strides in strengthening our financial foundation by both diversifying and streamlining our income sources. A major focus was placed on identifying opportunities to reduce wasteful expenditure, such as replacing software tools with more cost-effective alternatives that maintained, and in some cases improved, functionality. These efficiencies have enabled us to reinvest strategically, particularly in the development and training of our staff. As a result, we are better positioned to continue delivering services of the highest quality.

Our income for the year totaled has been drawn from a combination of sources. Having previously been almost solely reliant on grants, this represents a meaningful shift in our financial strategy. While grant funding remains a vital part of our income, the increase in revenue from sales, now comprising nearly 9% of our total income, reflects deliberate progress toward a more sustainable and self-reliant model, which has been a longstanding area for development.

Our intent moving forward is to continue diversifying our income streams, placing greater emphasis on earned income and sustainable practices that reduce dependency on grant funding. Additionally, we are actively working toward converting to a charitable status, which will enhance our governance structure and open up new funding and partnership opportunities. These steps are part of our broader commitment to long-term resilience, transparency, and impact.



Future Plans

For the 2025/26 year, Sporting Communities' priorities are to:

- Continue delivering youth-led community development initiatives in under-resourced areas facing significant social challenges, increasing support for health and wellbeing and ensuring sustained support is where it is most needed.
- Strengthen and expand our, and our partners, youth voice platforms to create meaningful pathways for young people, enabling strategic leaders to engage directly with them and shape services based on their lived experiences.
- Enhance collaborative partnerships with local, national, and corporate stakeholders, using data and identified need to drive joint efforts and widen our impact.
- Grow our training and development programmes within the youth work and community sport sectors to upskill the workforce, embedding best practice and improving service delivery across all areas.
- Develop and increase access to community assets, by investing in existing facilities, securing new spaces, and attracting funding to create safe, welcoming environments that reflect the needs of local residents.

"WE REMAIN DEEPLY COMMITTED TO LISTENING TO COMMUNITIES AND DELIVERING ETHICAL, HIGH-QUALITY SERVICES THAT MEET THEIR NEEDS."

Kevin Sauntry - CEO

Thank you

"I would like to take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the partners who make it possible for Sporting Communities to carry out our work. Your collaboration plays a vital role in ensuring that young people and communities receive the support, opportunities, and services they need to thrive.

We are especially grateful to our funders, whose support underpins everything we do. In particular, we'd like to acknowledge the significant contributions from the National Lottery Community Fund, BBC Children in Need and Derbyshire Police and Crime Commissioner and the Community Foundations in Staffordshire and Derbyshire. Their investment during 2024/25 has been instrumental in helping us reach and support so many.

A sincere thank you also goes to our incredible staff and volunteers. Your dedication, compassion, and relentless commitment to going above and beyond continues to inspire me daily. The quality of care and service you deliver truly changes lives.

Finally, thank you to the people who attend our programmes. Your involvement, ideas, and energy not only shape our services but also continually motivate our team. Your voice is at the heart of what we do.

Ross Podyma (Strategic Director)





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