

# ADVERTORIAL: Leus Family Foundation focuses on pandemic recovery for children

As the UK moves into a different phase of the pandemic, one charity is reflecting on its priorities as it continues its work to support the most vulnerable children. The Leus Family Foundation has identified recovery for children from the strains and isolation of the pandemic as a key focus for its work in 2022 and beyond.

When the pandemic was at its worst, the Foundation's priority was of course on those most urgent situations. For example, the Foundation donated to the Imperial Health Charity's Covid-19 Relief Fund which supports the five hospitals that form part of the Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust – Charing Cross, Hammersmith, Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea, St Mary's and the Western Eye. This donation was given to assist staff on the front lines, as well as patients and families affected by Covid-19.

A similar donation was made to the Royal Free London hospital charity.

The Foundation was also happy to step in and assist hospitals such as St George's Hospital Charity when they needed adaptors for the iPads given to patients and palliative care nurses who had to isolate preventatively during the worst periods of the pandemic.

The Foundation's emergency response was not limited to hospitals. It also chose to support the [Runnymede Foodbank](#), to assist families whose situation had further deteriorated due to the economic impact of the pandemic.

## **Plans for the coming year**

Dmitry Leus explains that there is now a slight shift in priorities, he said: “In 2020 and even 2021, a lot of the grants we gave were essentially emergency response. Whether the provision of PPE or enough food for a family for three days, we focused on the most acute needs. That was absolutely the right thing to do at the time. At present, as we take a step back and see the toll the pandemic has taken on children, we see that there are now long term areas in which we need to assist young people.

“Whether through poverty, illness or special needs, the UK’s most vulnerable children were naturally the most at risk in terms of suffering a decrease in their quality of life during the pandemic. If you’re very poor, then a lack of in-person school or attendance at a youth club hits you much harder than if you are more privileged, as that school or youth club was playing an even more significant role for you. And these hardships occurred when these children are still growing up, when their brains are still developing and when they are in great need of opportunity and social interaction.”

## **Grants to assist recovery**

It is for this reason that the Leus Family Foundation is prioritising grants that support work to assist children in their recovery from pandemic isolation.



Leus said: “It was enormously meaningful to see the Bright Lights attendees joyful and carefree at Jump Giants.”

(Image: Leus Family Foundation)

One example is the support given to [Bright Lights Youth Club](#). Bright Lights caters for children aged five to 13 who have special needs in the boroughs of Runnymede, Spelthorne and surrounding North West Surrey areas.

Lockdowns hit children with special needs and their families especially hard. Even without a pandemic, it can sometimes be more difficult for those with special needs and their families to access community facilities. Lockdown isolation was an especially lonely time for some young people with special needs and their families. That is why the Leus Family Foundation was so pleased to support Bright Lights with funding to stay open for the first time during the summer holidays, purchase new books, toys and equipment and perhaps the biggest highlight, a privatised visit to Jump Giants trampoline centre. Leus said: “It was like an antidote to lockdown to see them happily enjoying safe access to the

trampolines. We shouldn't underestimate children's need for fun and play and the healing effects it can have after a period of time when life was more limited."

There is a similar philosophy behind the Leus Family Foundation's support for [The Harrow Club](#) in West London.

The Club's activities range from sports clubs to drama and dance. The network of clubs welcomes children and young people between the ages of eight and 21 years old, of whom 80% are eligible for free school meals, 90% are from ethnic minority backgrounds and 20% have been diagnosed with learning difficulties or disability issues.

Leus explains that these are the children who have suffered deeply during the pandemic and are most in need of support after a prolonged deprivation of opportunity and social interaction when facilities were closed.

Leus commented: "We were so pleased to be able to provide them with a minibus and we are currently working to replicate our successful fencing lessons for state school children in Brixton at The Harrow Club. And our next project is to fly ten Harrow Club members and four staff to Cyprus around the Jubilee weekend for a special programme of water sports. The poorest children need opportunity, the chance to develop new skills, build resilience and really feel valued and gain confidence. We admire the Harrow Club's approach and are proud to support them."

Leus himself was born in Turkmenistan, the poorest country in the former Soviet Union. It's clear that his childhood has been a strong influence on his charitable giving: "If a child is disadvantaged and we take the time to give them an opportunity and show them that we believe in them, this can have a powerfully positive impact on the course of their life. We have a whole generation that has lived through an unusual time and it's our responsibility to help the most vulnerable

among them.”

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