THE STORY OF

THE LOCOS

OUR FIRST FIVE YEARS | 2021·2026



From eight teams without a home to playing at St George's Park.

126 GIRLS IN 2021 | 556 REGISTERED IN 2026

Eight weeks to save eight teams

A club built by the people who refused to let girls lose their place in football.

In 2021, the girls' section of a mixed-gender grassroots club was released just eight weeks before the new season. Eight teams and 126 girls suddenly faced losing their footballing home. The news left families and volunteers feeling lost, but it also brought them together.

Within two weeks, the volunteers had established FC Darlington Locomotives, created a badge, secured a training venue and arranged league entries. They had built the foundations of an independent club dedicated to women and girls. The difficult work was still ahead.



Early days: muddy grass pitches and makeshift goals.



Our first storage container.

THE STARTING POINT

8 teams • 126 girls • 8 weeks until kick-off

Every original volunteer stayed. Parents and local supporters gave time, donations and practical help, ensuring that a difficult ending became the beginning of an independent football family.

Making something from nothing

Borrowed kit, temporary floodlights and a remarkable volunteer effort.



The early playing kit was far from uniform. The sense of belonging was already there.

With no usable kit from the previous club, the first teams relied on individual sponsors, borrowed equipment and badges sewn onto shirts. Training continued through the winter on wet grass. Families donated what they could; every original volunteer stayed, and more joined.

A grant funded portable floodlights for two winters, while the arrival of a storage container made day-to-day delivery possible. By the second season, a whole-club sponsor helped bring proper numbered kits. Two more teams were formed, and Wildcats introduced new girls to the game.

THEN: BORROWED KIT AND TEMPORARY LIGHTS

NOW: MATCHING CLUB COLOURS, 3G AND COMMUNITY HUBS

A football family

The moments that matter most cannot be counted in trophies.





ONE CLUB, ONE FAMILY / THE TOURNAMENT THAT BROUGHT EVERYONE TOGETHER

THE LADIES· JOURNEY / THE WHOLE CLUB BEHIND EVERY TEAM

Recreational centres began in year two, followed by Squad Girls, Just Play and the first women’s team at the end of year three. The first women’s friendly drew 564 spectators and included three mother-and-daughter combinations. All six players remain involved in the game.

At one tournament, three younger Locos teams stayed behind to watch an older team’s penalty shootout. When the older girls won, their younger clubmates flooded the pitch to celebrate. They had not won the trophy themselves; they were celebrating as one family.

That support extends far beyond matchdays. Families have become friends, siblings have grown up together and girls of different ages have learnt to celebrate one another?s achievements.

564

SUPPORTERS AT THE FIRST WOMEN’S FRIENDLY

Three mother-and-daughter combinations on the pitch

Football is only the beginning

Growing opportunities across ages, settings and communities.



Little Locos: first experiences of football.



Wellbeing walks and social connection.

In summer 2024, holiday provision welcomed more than 300 participants. Older players began moving into seasonal work, supported through leadership, first aid and UK Youth opportunities. Delivery now takes place during school holidays, including HAF provision.

From the 2024/25 academic year, the club expanded into schools and now works across 16 school settings, including paid delivery. Alongside Development Centres, futsal and women’s football, the charity provides Loco Tots from 18 months, sensory football and community activities extending to care-home residents aged up to 107.

In 2026/27, new wellbeing walks, buggy walks and inclusive football opportunities broadened the offer further, with British Blind Sport and UK Youth among the important national partners.

18 MONTHS TO 107 YEARS

Participation, friendship and activity across generations

Growing people, not just teams

From young player to apprentice, coach and full-time employee.



Matching kits and new facilities are visible signs of a much bigger change.

Tamasin first played at under-11 level before progressing through the club’s women’s football pathway. She completed her apprenticeship with distinction and is now a full-time employee in her third year of work, coaching under-8s, Little Locos and Loco Tots.

The club now employs two staff members, supported by a wider group of around 55 staff, coaches, volunteers and committee members. A monthly Youth Committee, introduced in year five, gives young people a meaningful voice in decisions.

126 → 556

REGISTERED PARTICIPANTS, 2021–2026

16 SCHOOL SETTINGS

Outgrowing our home again

The next challenge is creating enough space for everyone who wants to join.

The 3G training space agreed in 2023 was a major milestone, but the club has grown to the limit of that allocation. Girls' training has also been displaced by men's fixtures. Meanwhile, rising costs make it harder to keep every activity affordable or free.

The response is not to turn people away. Locos wants a permanent home for women and girls: indoor and outdoor football, accessible fitness, pre- and postnatal activity, running clubs, wellbeing programmes and welcoming spaces for wider families.

Our ambition is not simply to add more teams. We want girls who cannot attend on a particular evening to find another session, girls without transport to have a way there, and girls with disabilities to see a place designed with them in mind. The proposed home would bring sport, wellbeing and family support together, rather than asking women and girls to fit around facilities built for someone else.



Community activities beyond matchdays.



A growing club that needs room to thrive.

OUR VISION FOR 2031

The UK's biggest women and girls' football club, with disability-specific teams, daily Development Centres across town, transport to overcome access barriers, international experiences and, above all, a permanent home.

More free sessions, inclusive teams, transport, staff and a permanent home: each step is about making belonging possible for more families.

One club. One family.

A personal message from the Chair

When we founded FC Darlington Locomotives, we had eight weeks before the season and 126 girls who needed somewhere to play. I remember muddy pitches, a sagging pop-up goal, borrowed kits with badges sewn on, temporary floodlights and no proper storage. Parents and volunteers refused to let those girls down. We were building a football club, but we were also building a place where they could belong.

Five years on, we have 556 registered participants, more than 20 teams in matching colours, 16 school settings, Development Centres, holiday provision and community activity from Loco Tots to older residents in care homes. Our two paid staff, volunteers and partners make possible opportunities we could barely have imagined. I am proud of the scale, but even prouder of the people behind it.

I see mothers playing alongside daughters, sisters growing up together and families who met through the club becoming friends, taking holidays together and supporting each other away from football. I will never forget the younger teams who stayed to watch an older Locos side in a tournament penalty shootout. When the winning penalty went in, they all ran onto the pitch to celebrate. They had not won the trophy themselves. They were celebrating as one family.

I have coached my own team since they were five or six. Seeing those girls invited to play at St George's Park, the home of England football, was something I never dreamed possible when we were starting out on wet grass. It brought home just how far they, and the club, had travelled.

Now I have a daughter of my own, ten months old, who will soon be old enough for Loco Tots. I am honoured to be Club Chairman and excited that the next generation, including my own family, will have opportunities we fought so hard to create. Our dream is a permanent home for every girl and woman who wants to be part of this family.

Nathan Beadle, Club Chairman

WATCH THE LOCOS PRESENTATION DAY VIDEO

Click here to watch on Facebook

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