

## Meet our Newly Appointed Board of Trustees!

We're thrilled to welcome our new Board and thank our members for having voted and chosen the people they feel are best placed to serve as trustees for the Actors' Benevolent Fund. With our new Board and new CEO, it is an exciting time for the charity, and we look forward to moving on and delivering the job in hand - helping as many people as possible in the acting and stage management community who are in need.



(From left) Alex Macqueen, Chris Heagren, Loyd Grossman, Abi Eniola, Lesley Joseph, Paul Cartwright, Dr. Esh Alladi, Alison Wyman (CEO), Jassa Ahluwalia, Sarah Watkinson and Simon Callow.



Jassa Ahluwalia



Sarah Alford-Smith



Dr. Esh Alladi



Simon Callow



Marilyn Cutts



Abi Eniola



Andrew Jarvis



Lesley Joseph



Alex Macqueen



Patrick O'Kane



Rob Rinder



Hannah Whittingham



Paul Cartwright  
(Co-opted Trustee)



Loyd Grossman  
(Co-opted Trustee)



Chris Heagren  
(Co-opted Trustee)



Sarah Watkinson  
(Co-opted Trustee)

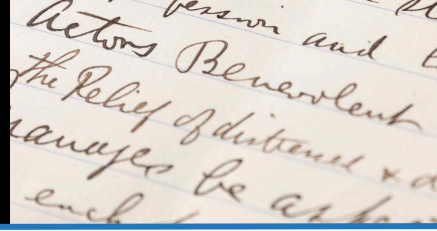
*"I would like to thank all who voted for me and I am so pleased to be joining the Board and I really look forward to taking this charity forward and getting down to doing what we are here for... To help those who need our help either through age or illness ... and to find ways to make sure that all those who need our help know exactly who to come to... I love this industry and I am here to help!"*

**Lesley Joseph (Trustee)**

*"Britain's theatre professionals are celebrated all around the world. Our acting and stage management community are at the absolute heart of the UK's pre-eminence in the theatre, film and television industries. It is an enormous privilege for me to join the Board of the Actors' Benevolent Fund at what I believe is going to be an exciting and transformational time as we work to provide evermore help to those in the profession in need of support."*

**Loyd Grossman (Trustee)**





## An Exciting New Era: Creating an Impactful New Strategy

I'd like to welcome our Board and very much look forward to working with them. The world today is a tough place as the cost of living crisis continues and so the work we do for our community has I believe become more vital than ever.

We are a charity with an amazing history - and we are absolutely focused on how we can keep helping actors and stage managers in 2024 and beyond. We are crafting a very clear strategy of how to do this in a world that is so different from when we were founded over 140 years ago – and indeed even 10 years ago.

***“The ABF is currently in a positive place with around two thirds more beneficiaries being helped in 2023 compared to 2022 and the charity developing new initiatives to increase awareness and impact.”***



Alison Wyman (CEO)

Our future strategy will focus on evidence as well as drawing on engagement with others, including findings from the members' survey which many of you kindly completed. This told us that the top priorities among members for the ABF include: providing financial support to those unable to work or due to the cost of living crisis, helping more people, improving the process of accessing support, increasing the membership, developing fundraising, and broadening further the range of support.

We will consider all of this, alongside key areas of need and where the ABF can create the most impact and is best placed to make a difference within the acting and stage management community going forward. This will result in a strategy with clear priorities for the organisation over the next few years.

The ABF is currently in a positive place with around two thirds more beneficiaries being helped in 2023 compared to 2022 and the charity developing new initiatives to increase awareness and impact. Along with the new Board I believe we can continue to build and improve on the help we provide, and myself and my team are very energised to do just that.

By Alison Wyman (CEO)

***“In the summer of 2022, three months after my thirtieth birthday, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. At an incredibly frightening time, when I was unable to work due to intense medical treatment, the ABF gave me financial support that allowed me to afford much-needed private oncology physio and talking therapy - the wait lists for NHS support were far too long, and I needed support immediately. The ABF also provided me with grants that helped hugely towards household bills. For two Christmases now, I have also received the most wonderful Christmas hamper! My treatment and recovery has been a long process - but the ABF has been there every step of the way. More than anything, the ABF gifted me peace of mind, a precious commodity in the storm that is cancer. I would encourage anyone in the industry who is unable to work because of sickness to reach out to them. I'm certainly glad I did.”***

Katie Schofield (Actor)





# Hear from the kind words of people we supported in 2023...

“I’ve spent the last 5 days mostly in bed trying to regulate my children’s emotions while they’ve seen me crippled by illness.

It’s been really hard for them and me.

And this morning, this wonderful hamper arrived full of treats, which I’ll share with carers and family.

But look at these pictures! Me and the kids have been rolling around, giggling and being silly in all the packaging.

It is really the first fun we have had together all week. YOU did that for us with your kindness and thoughtfulness.

There’s your impact right there.

Thank you.”



“Prior to being introduced to and applying for assistance from the Actors’ Benevolent Fund, I was all at sea.

Having been diagnosed with MS and finding the symptoms compromising my physical and mental well-being in so many ways, their help, support and encouragement was and has continued to be invaluable.

My place in the acting profession has been validated by their care, which just means so much.

When life throws unexpected challenges and limitations, it is hard to know what to do, but the ABF helped lift me out of that confusion and enabled me to work towards reviving confidence and self-regard.

Financially, it has been generous and practical yet also sensitive and additional advice regarding benefits, etc. I was given with knowledge and kindness.

Because they are always there, emotionally, I have felt so reassured and looked after.

I am grateful to every staff member of the ABF team for supporting me and letting me be reminded of who I am.

Thank you. Thank you Always.”

“Please, if you’ve fallen on hard times through, for example, injury, illness, advancing years, or anything preventing you from working in this profession, do not hesitate to contact these charities.

My medical condition may not have improved, but I am certainly in a far better position now psychologically and financially than a few months ago, for which I will remain eternally grateful.”



“I reached out to the ABF at a time of crisis, and they were friendly, understanding and helpful to my situation. Thank goodness this organisation exists, as their help has taken a weight off my shoulders.”



## Q&A with Lesley Joseph (Trustee)

**You have an incredible and extensive career in a precarious industry; what three habits or life skills do you think have helped you to have longevity?**

**(1)** I try and walk everywhere as keeping fit is vital... so rather than taking the lift I will walk up the stairs and I will walk through London as it is such a lovely way to see everything and get fresh air.... I also exercise when I can....

**(2)** I only worry about things I can change and don't about things I can't...

**(3)** I try to look for the positive in everything and everyone.... And live each day to the full....

Also, there is one more quote I want to add... I looked after Quentin Crisp for a week and the quote he gave me that has stuck with me forever was "Miss Joseph... Believe in fate, but lean forward where fate can see you"....

**What differences would you notice in starting your career today if you were beginning your profession in 2024?**

When I came into the business, there were repertory theatres where you could learn your craft, and many fewer TV channels and no reality television.... You also had to work for forty weeks before you could get your equity card to go on TV or the West End... it was never about being famous but being in the business you loved and wanted to work in...

**What has been your favourite piece of theatre or TV drama over the last 12 months and why?**

In the musical world, I have loved seeing Sunset Boulevard reimaged by Jamie Lloyd, which was just electric... and the play The Motive and the Cue.. about Richard Burton playing Hamlet in New York for John Gielgud, who was played by Mark Gatiss, who was beyond brilliant ... John Gielgud was one of my favourite actors, and it was like he had returned. Glorious!.....

**Why is the theatre meaningful to you?**

I think there is nothing more wonderful than live theatre... every night is different and working with an audience is a skill and sitting in an audience I think can be life changing. I wanted to act from the age of four!

## When the cost of living rises, we rise up as a community.

In response to the growing financial pressures being felt by households up and down the country as a result of very large increases to the cost of living, we have developed our emergency 'Cost-of-Living' grant.

This programme is designed to allow us to assist actors and stage managers who need help in a quick and easy way with everyday essentials such as household bills, kitchen appliances, clothes, and energy costs. The grants are available up to £2000. There is also the option for applicants to receive advice from our welfare support team, who provide invaluable help and guidance to those reaching out in their time of need.

For more information on our 'Cost-of-Living' grant, or if you know someone who may benefit from hearing about this new grant, please visit our website for further details.



**Struggling with energy bills?**

Apply online at  
[actorsbenevolentfund.co.uk/apply/cost-of-living](https://actorsbenevolentfund.co.uk/apply/cost-of-living)

Or call us on  
**020 7836 6378**



# Jarryd's Story

A year to the date, I walk out of hospital **cancer-free** and completely humbled by one of the most enduring years of my life.

At the beginning of February 2023, the day I signed my West End debut contract to perform in We Will Rock You, I was diagnosed with a tumour in my left lung. The term reality "slaps you in the face" couldn't have been clearer. So, the journey began.

To say nothing ever prepares you for these calls is the truth. I absolutely did feel like I was in a movie. Like a slow motion of my life was panning out before my very eyes. Why was I the main character? Is this specialist actually telling me this right now? It was surreal.

All I can say is thank God for my community, my family, the best friends in the world, and the ACTORS' BENEVOLENT FUND, **who had my back immediately**. A collective group of ANGELS who guided me to a place where I could choose to live and have peace of mind.

Unfortunately, my second surgery was more complicated. Lower lobectomy (removal of half my lung). Yikes! What transpired after that was about 4 weeks of complications trying to heal with infections beginning. Unfortunately, this infection persisted to the point that on the 27th of December, I had another surgery to wash out the lung, clear the infection and close an air leak that wouldn't heal. However, the best news was that I was officially CANCER FREE! The relief was worth it all. The mental game has definitely been the toughest part of this entire experience.

A couple weeks later, I'm feeling the strongest I have felt. It's my first week out of hospital, and the normalcy of life is so comforting. I still have a chest drain and an air leak I'm nursing, but my body is working hard to heal.

One day at a time! I miss performing so much. I miss everything I was physically able to do. Our health is everything, absolutely everything.

By Jarryd Nurden (*Actor*)

Jarryd and his family have set up an event to raise money for a number of causes, including the ABF. If any member would like more information about Jarryd's event and how to support it, please follow the link below:

<https://gofund.me/a0015929>

Let's connect on Instagram! We post about our latest news and share many services available for actors and stage managers. **Feel free to follow us there and drop a comment to say hello!**

@abf.uk 



"Where to even begin! The Actors' Benevolent Fund and The Royal Theatrical Fund were like knights in shining armour, sweeping me off my feet and rescuing me from the darkness. That's certainly how I have experienced these incredible organisations and their phenomenal teams.

A testimonial for what the Actors' Benevolent Fund has meant for me would be the biggest understatement as I believe there are truly no words to find that explain what they mean to me collectively and how each and every person I dealt with changed my life!

Unfortunately for me, my procedures couldn't have gone further downhill. Complications after complications, infections and the most extensive surgeries.

What I vividly remember from the ABF is the feeling of being VALUED, truly HELD, SEEN, and absolutely CARED FOR! From kindly and empathetically written emails to special cards, hampers and Christmas presents for under my tree. At a time when I was feeling my worst, the ABF gave me some magic and helped me to keep pushing through.

To anyone in our industry who is going through a trauma or requires financial aid or some sort of help, I encourage you to reach out. I was nervous to do so in the beginning. I felt like I should just get on with it, that there are people worse off than me and that maybe I don't deserve it. Well, I'm glad a friend forced me to reach out because I did need the help, a lot of help, and I still do. I'm eternally grateful for the kindness and generosity of the ABF and everyone who supports them! My deepest gratitude. THANK YOU!"

Jarryd Nurden (*Actor*)



# 'Only in Corrie can a woman be held at gun point and have a love affair in her 90s'

Julie Hesmondhalgh shared with us on our new podcast (The ABF Podcast) that Corrie was incredible for promoting older women on screen, adding: "One of the big issues for me in my list of pros and cons about leaving was that Coronation Street is a really, really amazing place to grow old. Especially as a woman".

**"There aren't many other genres, I suppose, where you're still getting fabulous storylines in your 80s and 90s. You know, you're still having love affairs and divorces and being held at gunpoint in the sweet shop. It's an amazing thing, and also it keeps you young. And so that really was the main thing that made me nervous about leaving."**

To read more, please visit the article in The Mirror: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/tv/tv-news/only-corrie-can-woman-held-32014594>, or listen to the episode itself, 'Ageing in the Industry' on The ABF Podcast. Our podcast is available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Audible and YouTube (with subtitles).

Listen to The ABF Podcast



## women are making a comeback on our screens.

The star, 53, is best known for playing Hayley Cropper on Coronation Street from 1998 to 2014 and last month she earned rave reviews playing Suzanne, the wife of Alan Bates in ITV drama Mr Bates vs the Post Office.

Also starring in Happy Valley and Broadchurch – which earned her a BAFTA nomination for Best Supporting Actress in 2018 – Julie has witnessed a change in the industry that celebrates older women.

She said: "I have definitely seen a change in attitudes towards it and an interest in telling those stories for sure."

"You know, things like Happy Valley have done wonders for middle-aged women, ordinary looking middle-aged women."

"Sarah Lancashire is just like every woman, and I don't know a single person who wasn't captivated by that performance and saw something of themselves in it."

"You know, [a] sort of curmudgeonly ordinary woman dealing with



**“ People with a rich & full life behind them make rich & full drama... that's exciting ”**

Julie, talking to the podcast for the Actors' Benevolent Fund – a charity supporting actors and stage managers in times of need – also hailed Sanditon star Anne Reid, 88, as brilliant. She said: "Lots of writers are catching on to the idea that people with a rich and full life behind them make rich and full and interesting drama as well. And that's really exciting."

She added Corrie was incredible for promoting older women on screen, saying: "One of the big issues for me in my list of pros and cons about leaving was that Coronation Street is a really, really amazing place to grow old. Especially as a woman."

"There aren't very many other genres, I suppose, where you're still getting fabulous storylines in your 80s and 90s."

"You know, you're still having love affairs and divorces and being held at gunpoint in the sweet shop."

"It's an amazing thing, and also it keeps you young."

"And so that really was the main thing that made me nervous about leaving."

## The Actors' Benevolent Fund and The Royal Theatrical Fund's Choir 2024 Dates

We are delighted to announce that the Actors' Benevolent Fund and The Royal Theatrical Fund Coffee & Choir mornings are beginning again for 2024.

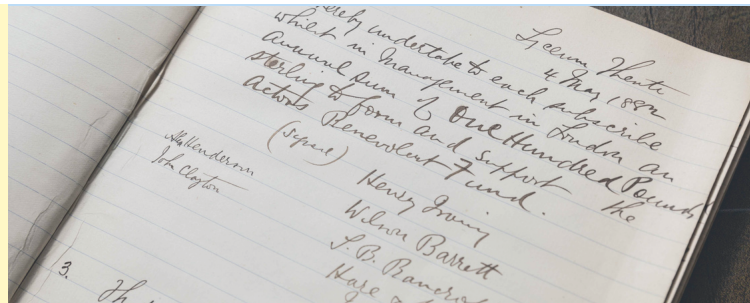
**What's involved?** Every other Monday, you are welcome to attend our Coffee and Choir mornings at St Paul's Church, Covent Garden (11 am-1 pm). A time for coffee, cake, singing, and being among a like-minded and friendly community. It is free to attend, and we welcome all abilities. Come join us for a cuppa and a fun couple of hours of singing!

**But I can't sing!** We warmly encourage ALL abilities. Please be assured that you are in very safe hands with our excellent MD Stefan Bednarczyk, who masterfully leads us in a range of material from Musical Theatre to Pop to Rock.

**Do I need to RSVP?** Not at all. Simply turn up on the day and be greeted by the friendly faces of Joel (The Royal Theatrical Fund) and Imogen (The Actors' Benevolent Fund).

### Dates for your diary:

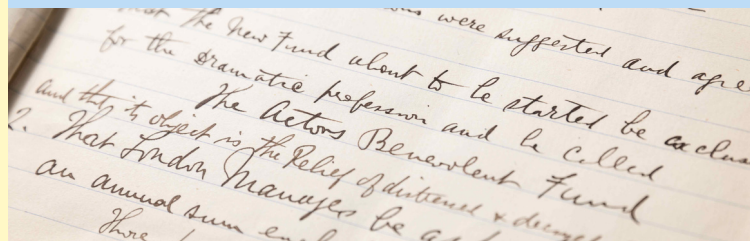
Monday 4th March	Tuesday 28th May	Monday 19th August
Monday 18th March	Monday 10th June	Monday 2nd September
Tuesday 2nd April	Monday 24th June	Monday 16th September
Monday 15th April	Monday 8th July	Monday 30th September
Monday 29th April	Monday 22nd July	Monday 14th October
Monday 13th May	Monday 5th August	Monday 28th October



## Dracula Writer Bram Stoker Revealed as a Humble Minute Taker for the ABF!

Although Stoker is now established as a writer of world renown, before he published Dracula in 1897 he was employed as a personal secretary to the founder of the fund, the actor Sir Henry Irving. Moving to London, Stoker was also later to take up the role of business manager of the Lyceum theatre, a job he stayed in for 27 years.

To find out more about how this mystery was resolved, please visit the article in **The Guardian**: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/jan/13/dracula-writer-bram-stoker-revealed-as-a-humble-minute-taker-for-actor-charity>





# Thought of the Month

We were deeply moved by **Samantha Morton's** (Actor, *She Said*, *The Whale*, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, *The Walking Dead*, writer *I Am...Kirsty* and director *The Unloved*) acceptance speech at BAFTA.

Samantha received the BAFTA Fellowship, the British Academy's highest honour at the BAFTA Film Awards. During her speech, the actor recalled how watching Ken Loach's *Kess* saved her. *"Seeing poverty and people like me, my life and my family on the screen, I recognised myself. Seeing representation matters."*

*"You see the stories we tell, they actually have the power to change people's lives. Film changed my life. It transformed me and it led me here today."*

Through the development of our Cost-of-Living grant and supporting actors unable to work due to injury, illness, and old age, the ABF are committed to supporting the profession so it remains accessible to everyone. The ABF wishes Samantha a huge congratulations for her award and for raising awareness of the importance of representation.



Let's connect on Instagram! We post about our latest news and share many services available for actors and stage managers. **Feel free to follow us there and drop a comment to say hello!**

@abf.uk 

WE ARE HERE  
FOR PROFESSIONAL  
**ACTORS**  
& STAGE MANAGERS  
WHO ARE IN NEED DUE TO  
**ILLNESS**  
**INJURY**  
**OLD AGE**

Do you  
know  
someone  
who needs  
help?

The Actors' Benevolent Fund is here to help actors and stage managers in times of injury, ill-health, and old age, as well as providing a sense of community and support in what can be a challenging industry.

We offer grants over the long and short term, including our most recent Cost-of-Living grant to support members struggling with basic living costs, and are in the process of expanding our offerings to include workshops, social hubs, and counselling support.

Sometimes potential beneficiaries feel that they should not be drawing on the ABF's resources, but often they are the very people we are here to help. Please encourage them to apply for help by either directing them to our website:

[www.actorsbenevolentfund.co.uk](http://www.actorsbenevolentfund.co.uk),

or contacting the ABF office to speak with the team:

Tel: 020 7836 6378

Email: [office@abf.org.uk](mailto:office@abf.org.uk)

## Christmas Card Call-Out!

It seems unspeakably early to think about Christmas, but we've already started planning for the ABF's range of Christmas cards this year.

Would you like to design an ABF Christmas card for our 2024 card range? We would love to hear from you!

A few notes to bear in mind when submitting your designs:

- The printers we use prefer to work with original artwork.
- If the artwork is submitted electronically then it should be a JPEG no less than 300 dpi (dots per inch).
- Please do not submit designs smaller than 6"4".

We will be selecting our card range for 2024 over the coming months, and so if you would like to submit a design, please do share this with us by **Tuesday 7th May**.

Please send all submissions and enquiries to us via email at [office@abf.org.uk](mailto:office@abf.org.uk).

