

SWDFEF Yeovil 2017 Forum Outline Report

The 2017 SWDFEF Forum was held on 19th October at Huish Park, the home of Yeovil Town F.C. The weather was very poor in the South West with Heavy rain in some areas and Fog in other areas. This appeared to prevent a number of delegates from attending the Forum.

The event was attended by 31 out of the 42 expected delegates from a wide range of clubs including Bristol Rovers, Cardiff City, Exeter City, Plymouth Argyle, Swansea City, Torquay United & Yeovil Town. Other representatives included Owain Davies and Kieran Reynolds from Level Playing Field & Mark Bradley from The Fan Experience Company. It was announced at the 2016 Forum that the 7 Rugby clubs in our region would be invited to this Forum. 2 of the 7 Rugby clubs indicated that they would attend and 2 clubs advised that they had matches on the day of the Forum so could not attend, however, neither of the 2 clubs attended as indicated, leaving no representatives from the Rugby clubs, which was disappointing.

Following a welcome from David Munn and Darren Way (YTFC Team Manager) there were two presentations by Level Playing Field. Owain Davies gave his presentation on Development. His Main theme was 'Promoting Good Access for all Fans'. In 10 years (1998-2008) LPF had increased its representation to include Horse Racing, Athletics, Cricket & Rugby along with Football, making them the ONLY national charity in England & Wales to represent disabled supporters in all sports. Owain stated that there were many issues still facing disabled supporters, including shortage of wheelchair user accessible viewing areas plus lack of accessible toilet facilities and changing places. LPF Enhance wellbeing through football and other sport by ensuring an equality of supporter experience.

Owain then listed and expanded upon the 7 main areas of LPF responsibilities and action. LPF, this year, have 350+ Sports Organised Staff DIET Trained, 3836 Recipients of LPF Monthly Newsletter, had carried out 7 DSA Regional Forums across 4 regions, have established 15 DSA's as part of the Working Together programme, plus a 45% increase in enquiries compared to 2016.

Kieran Reynolds then followed up with an overview of the Working Together Project where clubs can attend Forums like this one. Kieran stated that his brief included supporting clubs and disabled fans to form pan disability, user led Disabled Supporters Associations (DSA), establishing regional forums where clubs and DSAs can share information and best practise, giving ongoing support and guidance for new and established DSA's. Kieran stated that he had established Arsenal DSA, Bristol Rovers DSA, Aston Villa DSA & FC United of Manchester DSA this year. He has also established the South Coast, Welsh and North West Regional Forums with the first London Forum taking place on 08 November 2017. The outcome of all this activity is to have self-sufficient and sustainable Disabled Supporters Associations and a network of regional Forums to share information and best practise.

David Munn then gave a presentation on Yeovil Town DSA and its activities. He stated that they have around 80 members and have 86 disabled parking bays which they control. Amongst the DSA's brief is to represent all disabled supporters in their dealings with the club, to raise funds for the purpose of improving facilities for the disabled at Huish Park, to recommend and instigate measures to improve the match day experience for the disabled, to provide easily accessible offices for the disabled plus organise social and fundraising events for its members. Many improvements at Huish Park have been funded and/or organised by the DSA, in cooperation with the club. On matchdays many DSA members are sited around the outside and inside the ground to assist and help anyone who needs it. The DSA also sponsor and provide equipment & commentators for "Soccer Sight", the blind and partially sighted supporters commentary service, at all home games. All 10 DSA committee members have an active part in dealing with all matters concerning benefits for disabled supporters at YTFC.

After the buffet lunch, Mike Rowsell (YTFC DSA Committee member) outlined "What I expect from my club". He stated that there is a very good working relationship between the DSA and the club. He expected the club to provide a full service for the disabled supporter, from the initial contact to the Ticket Office right through to the match and post-match. He stated that most matters have already been addressed and resolved between the DSA and the club.

David Mills (Supporter Director & Business Development Manager) then gave his "Just Common Sense" presentation. 1)

There are around 13.3 million disabled people in the UK (almost one in five of the population). 2) There are two million people with sight problems in the UK. That's around one person in 30. 3) It is predicted that by

2020 the number of people with sight loss will rise to over 2,250,000. 4) There are approximately 10 million people (1 in 6) in this country with a hearing loss, 6.5 million of these are aged 60 and over. Around 2 million people use hearing aids.

Research conducted by Purple shows that over 80% of disabled consumers choose to shop in places that actively support disabled people.

The Department of work and pensions estimated that in 2014/15 the annual income of household with one or more disabled persons was £249 billion.

It is No good just having the infrastructure and policies. Staff training and commitment, with Leadership from the top is key.

The Future is to Aim High. David used as an example, Wesley Walker of the New York Jets American Football Team (NFL) who had a 12-year successful career, ending on retirement as the second highest yards for a wide receiver in the Jets History. He was blind in one eye!!

James Hillier (Matchday Safety/Stadium Manager) then gave his presentation. He outlined General Developments which included, Appointment of a Disabled Liaison Officer, Disabled Access Audit recently undertaken which we are currently awaiting the report, Working toward the equality code of practice, EFL regulation 112, Various stadium issues exist with works carried out in conjunction with DSA in accordance with club resource, Stadium maintenance tasks undertaken by DSA volunteers, Disabled Supporter Policy and Assistance Dog Policy currently being reviewed by DSA committee plus Steward training being carried out, with the first session completed by David Munn.

James outlined the pre-matchday procedures that were carried out along with the matchday procedures, which involved all departments and included Himself, as Safety Officer, along with other sources, giving a full briefing to Supervising stewards which was then cascaded down to the stewards, including the specific operational stewards. There were two sets of radios used so that all the relevant staff were kept fully aware of developments during the match.

In summary James stated that it was important to recognise the importance of the club's Disabled Supporter Association and Club's Disability Liaison Officer. Without its DSA, YTFC would not have the resource to provide the current level of service to home and visiting supporters. He also stated that the need to continue the promotion of the regional forum to share best practice is essential.

Bruce James (Disability Liaison Officer) then gave his presentation. He stated that he took on the DLO position in April this year after spending many years with the club as a maintenance person. Shortly after, in June, he was also appointed as the Chairman of the DSA. Although he has a lung problem he carries out his duties to the best of his ability and works very closely with all departments of YTFC to ensure that the quality of service given to the disabled supporter is of the highest quality possible. Bruce stated that there were many areas that are being addressed with the club, accepting that some would be long term, owing to financial constraints. The DSA are currently negotiating the purchase of a portacabin to be used as a point of contact for all disabled supporters on match days. As an interim measure, the DSA were using a programme selling unit, whilst they await the installation of the portacabin. Bruce also stated that he attends all steward briefings and, obviously, deals very closely with Sharon Swain (DSA Secretary) to ensure that all requests and enquiries from disabled supporters are fully actioned to their satisfaction.

David Munn commented that, as an example, a disabled couple had contacted the club regarding visiting the Yeovil v Crewe match on 14 October. Sharon Swain organised their tickets and disabled parking space but also arranged 2 passes for them to go into the upstairs lounge area for a drink. After the event they stated that everyone that they had come in contact with on the day, including Bruce, Sharon, Karen & Kevin had treated them as Royalty. Although it was the 82nd ground out of the 92 league clubs, it was actually their 119th club they had visited overall and The Yeovil Town Staff provided the Best Customer Service they have received at ANY FOOTBALL GROUND. David mentioned this as an example of how far the club go in ensuring that every disabled supporter's visit is memorable.

Harry Barnes & Lewis Winter (Community Sports Trust) then gave their "Disability Football" presentation. Both Harry &

Lewis volunteered at Yeovil Town Community Sports Trust for approximately 4 years, before being employed by the Trust in November 2016. As part of their CPD (continuous personal & professional development), they were tasked with running and helping set up a "Disability Football" programme. The Trust currently employs six full time members of staff, one part-time & ten casual coaches. They are also incredibly lucky to have ten fantastic volunteers! Using our four core themes of Sports Participation, Social Inclusion, Education and Health, we engage with over 800 children and young people on a weekly basis. We recognise the positive impact that our work currently has within our community, but are continually looking to develop and expand our reach in order to make a difference to people's lives.

Research gained from children and young people in Yeovil with disabilities found that there was significant demand for a Disability Football Programme. We currently provide weekly one-hour sessions for children & young people aged 5-16 with a SENSORY, PHYSICAL and LEARNING disability. Harry & Lewis then outlined the activity training sessions that they carry out.

They stated that their aim is to provide more opportunities for children, young people and adults with disabilities within the Yeovil & surrounding areas. So far, we have engaged with over 30 children/young people at 19 sessions. It is our intention to further grow our disability provision within the area. The Trust would appreciate any help with publicising this fantastic programme in order to engage with more children and young people with a disability.

Mark Bradley (The Fan Experience Company) then gave his presentation on his activities. Most businesses, in my experience, treat customer service, especially for disabled supporters, as a low priority. They may say it's important, but customer value isn't measured, senior officials don't talk about it, it's not a priority at meetings and, as is abundantly clear to anyone who works in the organisation, there are far more important priorities. The biggest thing you can do to revolutionise perceptions of your club will be to start taking match day staff seriously. Give them a purpose (beyond leaning against a wall and not knowing where the club shop is); give them 'freebies' to give to kids, away fans, etc. - maybe even a pin badge, recognise them - have supporters choose the best stewards of the month and then have a high profile 'end of year' awards night for your own people; show them that they are valued and, believe it or not, they'll make others feel valued too. Most supporters believe that their clubs keep them at an arm's length. Sometimes this is because of a feeling that 'we can't please anyone' and often simply because it's not been done before and you're not sure how to do it.

Measure Supporter Engagement. What we measure defines us also. If all we measure is attendance, then we can only guess at what is driving that. However, if we're on top of the factors influencing attendance, we're naturally better placed to take remedial action. What is the reason for non-renewal of season tickets? What is the reason an irregular supporter has started to come more often? How strongly would supporters recommend the club to people who've not been to games before? How easy is it to deal with the club? How valued do you feel as a fan? Give me this data and I can build a sustainable club. Evaluate the services you offer disabled supporters. Do you have a steward that goes to them, asks them if they require refreshments, then goes off to purchase it all for them? Cardiff City have completely changed their philosophy towards the supporter and have benefitted immensely from their actions.

Since 2009, I have been working with the EFL (Football League) on a number of fronts (families, children, away fans, women, disabled supporters, etc.) using real supporter feedback as a catalyst to help improve clubs' awareness of the needs of different supporter groups and to also improve their experiences. The feedback from disabled supporters, over several visit programmes, has been particularly powerful and they have seen many clubs improve levels of service, experience and engagement to disabled supporters while the EFL has supported clubs' efforts to improve, with two dedicated disabled fan experience seminars and their most recent publication (Accessible Supporter Guide). This work is continuing this season with around 25 more visits to undertake, so they are looking for disabled fans, in every region of the country, to plan, travel to and attend matches (at clubs they're new to) and to provide feedback on a completed feedback form.

Expenses (up to £150) will be paid. If you are interested? Please contact me at mark@bradleyprojects.com. This is the first Regional Forum that I have addressed and am looking to attending other Regional Forums arranged by LPF.

If you're not going to be sweeping all before you on the pitch, then what's making you different off it? Make 2017/18 the year you discover niche marketing.

There then followed a short 'Question & Answer' session where delegates discussed subjects covered and also asked for input from other delegates regarding ideas for the way that they can work at their particular club.

Finally, it was confirmed that the 2018 SWDFEF Forum will be held on 18 October 2018 at Bristol Rovers F.C.

David Munn then thanked everyone for attending and hoped that they had found the Forum worthwhile. He wished them all a safe journey home and looked forward to meeting them again, if not before, at the 2018 SWDFEF Forum. He then closed the Forum.