



SWDFEF Newsletter February 2019

sharing experiences to improve disabled
access and services for disabled fans



South West Disabled Fans' Experience Forum



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T.E.A.M.

Together Everyone Achieves More

**Bristol City; Bristol Rovers;
Cardiff City; Cheltenham Town;
Exeter City; Forest Green Rovers;
Newport County; Plymouth Argyle;
Swansea City; Swindon Town;
Torquay United & Yeovil Town**

Level Playing Field

On 05 January, at the home game, Yeovil v Bury FC, we were privileged to receive a visit from Liam Bird, the recently appointed Level Playing Field Fans Liaison Officer. Liam used this visit as a familiarization trip where he could update himself with the activities of our own DSA. As well as the normal DSA activities Liam was briefed about our 'Soccer Sight' set-up, including listening in to the match commentary and was also briefed about our SWDFEF activity. Liam said, "The results might not be going Yeovil's way on the pitch but the Yeovil DSA is flying high".



Liam Bird's report appears later in this newsletter.

Give us your questions

Plymouth Argyle DSA have suggested that, as an enhancement to our annual Forums, anyone who has a subject that they would welcome input and comments from other clubs, in between Forums, please email them to me at d.g.munn@btinternet.com and I will circulate them. Once ALL replies are received (no more than two weeks after I have raised the question), I will send all input and comments to every club. Thanks.

Or you can use facebook page : - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/DFSAT>

SUCCESS



You do not really understand something unless you can explain it to your grandmother - Albert Einstein



Yeovil Town DSA

Christmas Meal on 03 December 2018

A fantastic evening was enjoyed by over 100 people, which included Darren Way (Team Manager), Terry Skiverton (Asst Team Manager) & Paul Terry (Team coach) plus all the players.

A grand total of £389 was raised in the raffle and auction, which included a Francois Zoko signed shirt, 2 match day tickets and a bottle of Brandy.

Our thanks go to Janet Lawrence, plus Janet Samways, Alexandra Samways & Eileen Becky for their organising of the draw and the magnificent prizes that they also provided. Plus our thanks must go to Clive Robinson & his team for an excellent Christmas menu.



Experience is the name that everyone gives to their mistakes
- Oscar Wilde



Exeter City DSA

Exeter City's Changing Places facility in the Stagecoach Adam Stansfield Stand was officially opened on the EFL's Day of Disabilities, Monday 03 December. The new changing places room was part of the £3.5 million redevelopment of St James Park, which was completed in October 2018.

The changing places facility has been a collaboration between the club and the Exeter City Disabled Supporters Association. The ECDSA raised £3000 which has paid for the bench, hoist and privacy screen. The funds were raised through their Christmas draw and bucket collections.

Nick Saunders, ECDSA chairman said: "We at ECDSA strive to ensure access for all. The Changing Places room is a good chance to make an improvement that has been missing. It is open to home & away supporters".

"This is a fantastic facility that is the first in Devon at a professional football club. This has all be made possible by the hard work of the ECDSA committee, it's members and the fans of Exeter City Football Club."



Yeovil Town DSA

Yeovil Town Football Club players and staff visit Lufton College



Team Manager Darren Way took his players and staff to Cambian Lufton College, Yeovil on 18 December 2018 as part of their visits at Christmas time. The college is a specialist further education college for young people with a learning disability and complex needs. A great afternoon was enjoyed with some festive cheer and lots of memories to share.



The rebirth of the little green giants

"We've had letters from Manchester United and Liverpool supporters that said that they have travelled all over Europe and that our assistance when it came to disabled parking and match day experience were one of the best they have seen. That's a huge compliment when you're a small club in Somerset" - David Munn (DSA member and Audio Descriptive Commentator)

It may have taken the club 108 years to enter the Football League (Having formed in 1895 and promoted to the Football League in 2003 then going on to reach the heights of The Championship in 2013) the only league club in Somerset are now fighting to continue their stay in the Football League, but away from their battle on the pitch the Yeovil DSA are making mammoth strides in its quest to provide a match day experience that will rival its Premiership counterparts, even if the football on the pitch is not reaching that standard.

But this story of triumph and reverse could have been very different!

Yeovil Town DSA formed in 1999 but the committee became "dormant" in 2004 but there was one person in the background with drive and determination who waved the flag for disabled supporters at Yeovil Football Club.

"Being disabled myself I know how difficult it can be to attend games, So I did what I could to make sure there was still a voice at the club for disabled Yeovil Town Supporters once the DSA went dormant" - Sharon Swain

Sharon is now the Chair of the Yeovil Town DSA after it was reformed in the summer of 2009 and a new committee was elected.

" My main reason for staying on after the DSA went dormant was to make sure that disabled parking was being guaranteed for my fellow disabled supporters. Knowing that you had a guaranteed space could be the difference between attending the game or not"

Sharon oversaw disability parking was safeguarded and even went as far as painting the parking numbers and lines herself.

It wasn't only the parking that Sharon oversaw. Before the reformation of the DSA Sharon would write up to 80 personal letters to all the disabled fans that the club knew of every season with club information and hand deliver them through people's letterboxes.

"It's so important to put a face to a name in a small community like Yeovil. It means a lot to people" - David Munn

Since its rebirth in 2009, the DSA has gone on to hold regular social events

"We now have over 100 people attending some events"

They offer guaranteed disability parking spaces and assistance from car to seat, half time tea's and coffees, assistance blankets for supporters who are feeling the chill of Huish Park and Audio Descriptive Commentary for its blind and visually impaired supporters, just to name a few.

It's not only the home fans that are treated like Yeovil family. The Away supporters are also high on the DSA's list.

"It starts before they come to the ground"

The DSA send out an away supporter's pack, a week or two in advance, with helpful game day information

"In the pack is information on local transport, stadium facilities, letting them know that there are guaranteed parking spaces available for them and that we can post out a parking badge before they arrive. All this information is so important for supporters who might feel nervous about attending an away game. We want fans who come to Huish Park to feel relaxed and enjoy a game of football and maybe come back again next season with a friend who had the same anxiety as them, because they know that they will be looked after!" - Mike Rowsell (DSA member and fundraiser)

Away from match days, Mike has taken it upon himself to go out to the public and educate the people of Yeovil about the work that DSAs do and what can be offered at the club.

"I went and spoke at one school and one of the teachers was so impressed because she wasn't aware that there was something like the DSA out there. We as a DSA have to be out in the community and letting people know who we are and what we can offer for the good of the Club and DSA".

With a population of just under 45,000 Yeovil has one of the smallest populations for a league club in England. Compared to its near-ish neighbours Exeter with 129,000 and Bristol with 459,000.

"Although we are not a very big town, I think sometimes that can play to our advantage. Being a bigger club in a large town or city, you can lose that community sense of who your members are and lose that personal touch" - Mike Rowsell

Liam Bird of Level Playing Field, Yeovil DSA visit report - Part 3 of 3

It's these personal touches that have made this "small" club in Somerset awake from hibernation back in 2009 and become a giant within their footballing community.

"It's not about offering the greatest facility it's about offering all that you can and delivering that to the best of the club's and DSA's ability. If you can make a fellow disabled supporter feel respected, valued, and made to feel like they matter for that hour and a half, I think that's priceless." - Sharon Swain

If you are interested in joining the Yeovil DSA or would like more information on Yeovil DSA then click the link. <https://www.ytfcdsa.net/>

If you would like to know more about DSAs or see if there is a DSA for your club then click this link. <https://www.levelplayingfield.org.uk/>



Exeter City DSA

2018 Christmas Draw raises a massive £1,671.56

Over the last couple of months', a group of volunteer ticket sellers, led by Committee Member Martin Robertson, have been busy persuading supporters and the good people of Exeter and beyond to part with a little bit of their hard-earned cash in exchange for a Christmas Draw raffle ticket.

Again, for this year's Christmas Draw (which is held every two years) we are extremely grateful to all those who so kindly donated prizes for the draw including: - Exeter Nissan, Mi Space – Midas, GreenMyBusiness, Subway of Sidwell Street, Mr D Herniman, Signs Express, Hartley's Certified Accountants, Elaine Davis & ECFC and ECDSA Committee Members, together with everyone who sold and purchased draw tickets.

The draw took place on Wednesday, December 12th at 7pm at the Park and was attended by City player & ECDSA President - Lee Holmes, together with Russell Lemon from Exeter Nissan who both helped to draw the lucky winning tickets. All in all, there were 31 prizes up for grabs. (Nick Saunders)

Yeovil Town DSA



DSA Christmas Bingo at Huish Park on Wednesday 12 December 2018

What a great night where a magnificent amount of £700 was raised for the DSA funds as we get closer to the Total amount required for our planned DSA Portacabin base at Huish Park.

Congratulations to Tracy Wilson and her helpers for arranging this event and a special thanks to those who came and supported us for the evening.



The Christmas Craft & Toy Fair had some lovely stalls with a really good variety of items. The event was advertised really well, in papers and posters everywhere plus on three local radio stations all week.

Congratulations to all who were involved in organising the day.

The next Bingo evening and Craft & Toy Fair will be arranged during the 2019 Easter Period.

Portacabin Update - We now have the funds and are waiting for the concrete base to be laid, then the Portacabin can be installed.

Newport County DSA

Newport County AFC are delighted to support new group 'Carers in the County', launched by the Club and NCAFC Disabled Supporters Association (DSA) on the first ever #EFLDayofDisabilities on 03 December 2018

'Carers in the County' forms part of the club's commitment to supporting the local community and has been created by Newport County AFC's Disabled Supporters Association in partnership with Newport County AFC and Newport City Council.

Although it has been set up to encourage engagement from County supporters who identify in this role, it is welcoming and open to everyone providing care for someone that is not part of their vocational responsibility.

The group aims to provide information and advice on services, grants, and support available to people that are informal carers for family members or friends who may need additional support.

Sometimes informal carers do not realise the rights or support they are entitled to as they see themselves as doing what is natural for friends or family. It is recognised that this can be a stressful role that can often change the dynamic of a relationship within a family or circle of friends and that is how 'Carers in the County' can help.

Most people do not know where they can seek help and support, or may have a negative view towards the local authority and the assistance available to them.

With this in mind, 'Carers in the County' allows those with a common interest to meet up informally with others that understand them and discuss their concerns, views and hopes as well as the chance to have some well-deserved time out.

Cllr Paul Cockeram, Cabinet Member for Social Services, Newport City Council said: "Newport County AFC is truly leading the way to ensure an excellent match day experience is accessible to everyone, from the club being dementia friendly to the support offered to unpaid carers and disabled supporters. Newport City Council appreciates how the club has worked tirelessly to ensure fans can continue to feel a part of their community and enjoy the well-being it brings to people supporting football at Rodney Parade. A special thanks to the dedication of the DSA for taking the time to volunteer to make the club inclusive and welcoming to all".



Newport County DSA (continued)

The support group will meet monthly at Bar Amber and be facilitated by three volunteers who are also members of the DSA; Jane Brussalis, Tina Olander and Robert Taylor.



Further details of the meetings will be shared on the Official Club Social Media accounts.

Plymouth Argyle DSA

Plymouth Argyle's new Grandstand is going ahead at a pace. The old Stand has been partially removed and numerous HGV's are seen every day. The new shop is in situ and is being kitted out with an opening day planned very soon. PADSA (disabled supporters' group) continue to be a part of the refurbishment. The new supporters bar has its metalwork erected and its looking fantastic. We have been working closely with the Green Taverners who operate the bar and are very pleased that they are offering the opportunity to improve our match day experience by having excellent Disabled access and facilities for our use.

PADSA is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year and plans are afoot to have a Buffet early in March. Our new DLO at the club is now in post and although her work load is heavy, we have great communication links with her and the wider club. On the field our performances have been somewhat inconsistent however we are no longer bottom and have started to fight to stay in League one.

We have our sponsors lunch in March, this was postponed before Christmas owing to the building works. We had to change our sponsorship in January after our player Gregg Wylde left the club. We now sponsor a returning favourite Oscar Threlkeld who has recently come back to the club on loan.



Swansea City DSA



Swansea City Disabled Supporters' Association (DSA) were treated to special guest appearances from Graham Potter, Alan Curtis, Daniel James and Jay Fulton at their annual Christmas party on Wednesday 05 December

Potter, Curtis, James and Fulton met and mingled with the DSA members before singing Christmas carols at their social, which was compered by Kevin Johns and held at the Liberty Stadium.

Cath Dyer, secretary and trust representative for the DSA, said: "We enjoyed food, Christmas carols and a raffle, while Santa came out to give presents to the children.

"You can see the happiness in everyone's faces – they really enjoyed themselves.

"The DSA is like one big family rather than an organisation. You can really feel the Christmas spirit in the atmosphere, as everyone's come with their Christmas jumpers and tinsel.

"We try to make the events as inclusive as possible – for young children and the older generation.

"It's a lovely way to round off the year."

The DSA, which launched in 2013, is continually growing, with 85 members at present.

The DSA look to improve facilities and policies that affect disabled supporters by working with the club and other bodies.

Swansea City DSA (continued)

With committee meetings held monthly, and social gatherings held three times per season, the DSA Christmas party is an important time for members to get together to socialise.

"Swansea City has a great reputation for supporting disabled fans," explained Johns, the life president of the DSA.

"It means a lot to the fans that the manager has come along. Plus, Alan Curtis is a legend of the club, everybody loves him!"

Swans winger James said: "I really enjoyed it. We signed a few autographs, had pictures and were asked some great questions by the members. Kev even had us singing some Christmas carols!

"I think a lot of these people have supported Swansea for a long time and I think it's massive for disabled people to be able to watch the games.

"I know a lot of them go to away games which is obviously a big effort but it's great to see that they're able to enjoy it as much as everyone else does."

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Level Playing Field's Weeks of Action

Why not get involved in Weeks of Action (2nd – 17th March 2019)

