

Matty's goal to help feed those in need

A group of footballers are playing the game they love and raising money for foodbanks. Andrew Dowdeswell hears more about the initiative.

ALMOST 2,000 members, £20,000 and immeasurably more food donated. This is the result of amateur footballers coming together to play to raise money for local foodbanks.

Seeds for the idea were planted more than 6,000 miles away in Vietnam. When he lived there before the Covid-19 pandemic, Matty MacNeil played in local 'pick-up' games, where groups of friends would come together for friendly fixtures. Upon returning to Sheffield, he wanted to continue, but he didn't enjoy playing for the local 11 and five-a-side teams. So Matty took to Reddit, an online media community, and asked if anyone would be interested in friendly scrimmages.

The response was massive, and he was very quickly running two games per week. He charged players £3 per match, which covered the pitch hire and equipment. But as more players joined and the group grew, Matty collected a surplus every week. He wanted to use it for good – and so Football for Foodbanks (FFF) was born.

The charity is less than three years old, but its impact on the most vulnerable is huge – and it is only growing. "The thought of children waking up to empty cupboards in the morning is upsetting to me," Matty says. "I have always donated to foodbanks, so I felt it was right to donate this money to them, too."

During the pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis, foodbank usage across the UK has soared. The latest figures from the Trussell Trust show 2.1 million food parcels were handed out to people facing financial hardship in the 12 months to March 2022, 14 per cent higher than in 2019-20, before the pandemic.

In Sheffield, where FFF began, the picture is even bleaker – more than 60,000 food parcels were handed out across 18 distribution centres in 2021-22, almost four times the number distributed in 2019-20. Of these, 23,000 were given to children.

Alison Wise helps at the S6 Foodbank, which hosts 13 sessions across 11 Sheffield locations. She says groups such as FFF are critical to the lifeblood of local foodbanks,

where people can pick up food parcels and receive the help they need.

The donations, she says, are hugely impactful, but the awareness is equally as important. "They get our message out to people who we wouldn't otherwise reach," she tells me. And that, she says, leads to longer-term and more sustainable giving from communities and businesses.

FFF's support of S6 Foodbank and others in the area has led to rapid development of services available to those in need. The foodbank now features a cafe, where guests can have a hot drink and a snack. They can also book Citizen's Advice sessions, seek debt support and get help with other issues in their life.

"We've worked really hard to make a place where people can come, sit and just be," Alison says. "Lockdown took away a lot of the conversations we have. That's where the power of what we do is, so to have them back is hugely important."

Part of the FFF ethos is playing football in a friendly and inclusive manner.

Alice Rhind-Tutt got involved in 2020 when her partner started playing. Her weekly football game had been closed down, and she was looking for another opportunity to play regularly.

She reached out to Matty, asking if she and some female friends could join in. Matty welcomed them and also offered to put on a separate game if they could get enough players. Alice put the call out, and the Women's and Gender Minorities division began.

Fast forward two years, and more than 250 women and minority genders have played at least once. They offer 34 weekly slots in Sheffield alone, and have active communities in Manchester and Chesterfield too.

Alice says the growth of the women's professional game has 'legitimised' them. She welcomed many new players to the group following England's triumph at last summer's Euros.

FFF is also open to transgender and non-binary players. The charity sells rainbow laces that all players can buy – and you will see many sporting them in their boots at their many matches. It also held a summer



CHARITABLE AIM: Thousands of amateur footballers have signed up for the Football For Foodbanks initiative.

tournament with the Sheffield Laces, a local organisation encouraging women and minority genders into football.

The men's divisions are now spread across four cities – Sheffield, Chesterfield, Manchester and Milton Keynes. In Sheffield, Matty and his team of volunteers run at least six games of football per week, with 110 slots that players can sign up for in an active Facebook group. They use snazzy graphics to reveal the line-ups for each match, and sometimes play tournaments and friendlies against local teams, with the

entry fee often a bag of food, rather than cash. The charity has just received £10,000 in funding from the National Lottery, and Matty is planning for further expansion, with more locations on the way. Wherever they will be, they will meet local foodbanks in growing need.

Emma Revie, chief executive at the Trussell Trust, says this winter has been the hardest yet, and the organisation's latest figures show demand has now surpassed supply, with the need for emergency

food outstripping donations for the first time.

Meanwhile, the cost-of-living crisis has led to a drastic increase in the number of people turning to foodbanks for support, and Ms Revie has called on the Government to close the gap between inflating prices and incomes.

With high inflation, soaring interest rates and high energy and food prices expected to last into 2024, there is certainly a need for groups like FFF. Thankfully, Matty feels there is much more to come.



CELEBRATION: King Charles will attend the Commonwealth Day Service.

Commonwealth Day and Hunt's spring Budget

John Blow
FEATURES WRITER

THE Royal family will be out for Commonwealth Day, the spring Budget will be met with mass strikes, the Lib Dems meet in York and Red Nose Day is back. We take a look at the week ahead.

COMMONWEALTH DAY

The King, Queen Consort and other members of the Royal family will carry out engagements to celebrate Commonwealth Day.

People all over the Commonwealth in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Americas, the Pacific and Europe observe the annual celebration, which is today, and marks the beginning of a week-long series of events and

activities happening around the globe – including faith and civic gatherings, debates, school assemblies, flag-raising ceremonies and cultural events.

The King and Queen Consort, accompanied by the Prince and Princess of Wales, Earl and Countess of Wessex, Princess Royal and Vice Admiral Sir Tim Laurence will attend the annual Commonwealth Day Service at Westminster Abbey.

The theme for Commonwealth Day 2023 is 'Forging a sustainable and peaceful common future'.

HUNT'S BUDGET

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt is to set out his spring Budget on Wednesday amid a cost of living crisis and widespread industrial action.

It comes after National Energy Action,

Age UK, Greenpeace UK and 20 other organisations urged him to announce £5.3bn for home insulation and £3.37bn for heat pump installation along with a further £6bn a year for the next decade to help the poorest households.

Mass strikes will coincide with Mr Hunt's statement. Hundreds of junior doctors in the Hospital Consultants and Specialists Association (HCSA) will walk out, more than 70,000 staff at 150 universities are due to take strike action by the University and College Union (UCU) and teachers with the National Education Union (NEU) are set to stage the final two days of walkouts. These will take place after NHS junior doctors go out on strike in a dispute over pay today as the British Medical Association holds a 72-hour walkout. Rail strikes are due to take place on Thursday and Saturday.

PARTY CONFERENCE

The Liberal Democrats will host their party conference in York from Friday to Sunday.

Q&As with MPs and party figures, debates and fringe events will be on at locations including the Barbican.

Leader Sir Ed Davey is due to give his speech on Sunday.

COMIC RELIEF

Families will gather around the television for the latest Red Nose Day antics on Friday night.

AJ Odudu will be joined by David Tennant, Joel Dommett, Paddy McGuinness and Zoe Ball as presenters. Kylie Minogue is reported to be featuring in a *Ghosts* sketch, while an unexpected contestant will appear in a *Love Island* parody.

PUZZLES POST

16 daily crosswords and puzzles for you to enjoy – every day in The Yorkshire Post.

Plus, on a Saturday, two extra puzzle pages in the Magazine and your 8-page weekend Puzzles Post supplement.



ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN AN AMAZING TRIP TO PHILADELPHIA

To celebrate the **March 17** release of **Shazam! Fury of the Gods**, we have teamed up with **Warner Bros. Pictures** to bring you a very special offer. Enter for a chance to **win a holiday to Philadelphia** including return flights, accommodation, transfers, shopping and dining vouchers, **PLUS** a VIP tour of the city's famous movie locations including those featured in both **Shazam!** and **Shazam! Fury of the Gods**.

"Shazam! Fury of the Gods," continues the story of teenage Billy Batson who, upon reciting the magic word "SHAZAM!," is transformed into his adult Super Hero alter ego, Shazam.



TAKE A VIP MOVIE LOCATION TOUR



SEE THE CITY'S HISTORIC LANDMARKS & FAMOUS MOVIE LOCATIONS



You can also claim a set of exclusive movie gifts including a **Bluetooth Tracker** and **branded Kit Bag**.

CLAIM & ENTER AT **MEDIAOFFERS.CO.UK/SHAZAM**

Stay in the know and get access to exclusive competitions with

THE BIG DC GIVEAWAY



ONLY IN CINEMAS MARCH 17