

# LEVEL PLAYING FIELD



# PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD

This is my 12th year as President and I'm pleased to welcome you to Level Playing Field's annual impact report. The organisation has grown considerably in that time and this year saw Level Playing Field move offices from Wembley to Watford and implement and deliver a new strategy.

Since the Premier League reported on its clubs' pledge to meeting Accessible Stadia, progress has undoubtedly been made. However, there is still work to be done in football and other sports, to ensure disabled fans have a fully inclusive match day experience. I am very grateful to the Board of Trustees, the Ambassadors and my fellow honorary Officers for their continued support

and commitment to Level Playing Field. I am always struck by the dedication of the trustees and staff as they continue to operate so successfully with only limited resources and to ensure that the issues still facing many disabled sports fans remain high on the agenda.

I am looking forward to another exciting and successful year ahead for the charity.

With best wishes,

**David Bernstein CBE,  
President**



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**THANK YOU**





# MISSION AND VISION



# 'DRIVEN BY DISABLED SPORTS FANS'

## OUR VISION

A world in which all disabled fans can freely access and enjoy live sporting events.

## OUR MISSION

Level Playing Field promotes a positive, inclusive experience for disabled sports fans. We believe that attending and engaging with live sporting events has a positive impact on wellbeing. We work at every level to ensure that disabled fans can freely access and enjoy live sport.



# BRANDING



In early 2018 Level Playing Field decided to completely review all aspects of its image and engagement with our community and stakeholders. This led us to the conclusion that a complete rebrand was called for to try and highlight those areas of our work that were of greatest importance.

The process had started in 2017 where Fans, Disabled Supporters Associations (DSAs), Clubs, Governing Bodies and many more were approached in an attempt to determine how Level Playing Field was viewed and how it could be improved.

A common response was the lack of awareness of who we were and what we did and in order to emphasise that we are a charity that campaigns for greater access for disabled sports fans to watching live sport we decided on the rebranding of our organisation.

Part of the rebrand involved a logo change and we have now migrated from the Level Playing Field 'Flag' to the Level Playing Field 'Field – Pitch'.

We sought to clearly identify - Who we are; What sector we are involved in and Who we want to support.



# THE FOUR PILLARS

Our new strategy is based on 4 Key Pillars:

- **For the Fans**
- **For the Clubs**
- **Knowledge Centre**
- **Campaigns**

Through these pillars of work, we provide support and advocacy for disabled fans, offering expert advice guidance and services to clubs and governing bodies, supporting design teams to implement accessible facilities at the earliest stage and campaigning to keep the disability agenda at the top of everyone's mind.

Putting it simply Level Playing Field campaigns and works towards improving the matchday experience for disabled fans by driving an equal matchday experience.

Our approach is to engage with all of our key stakeholders to improve access and inclusion for disabled fans and we aim to be proactive, and look to address problems and share best practice to maximise opportunities for disabled fans to take part.



**FOR THE FANS**

**FOR THE CLUB**

**CAMPAIGNS**

**KNOWLEDGE  
CENTRE**

# MEET THE TEAM



**Owain Davies**  
Chief Executive



**Ruth Hopkins**  
General Manager  
(NRAC Auditor)



**Nicky Baker**  
Disability Access Officer  
(NRAC Auditor)



**Liam Bird**  
Fans Liaison Officer



**Daniel Townley**  
Development Officer



**Ben Southby**  
Media & Communications Officer

## Trustees

**Tony Taylor** Chair

**Rex Burton**

**Steve Evans** Secretary

**Joanna Deagle**

**Jo McNicol**



# TONY TAYLOR

## Level Playing Field Chair



On behalf of the board of trustees and the staff at Level Playing Field I would like to formally welcome you to the this our 2018-19 Impact report.

As you have read ahead of this Level Playing Field has been through an exciting period of change in the quest to harness and maximise our impact as a charity.

Our vision and aim are clear 'A world in which all disabled fans can freely access and enjoy live sporting events.'

This can only be done through a collaborative approach where clubs, fans, DSAs and Governing Bodies coming together to drive standards and bring about change.



In a time where disability abuse and hate crime is on the rise, we need to address this through campaigns, speaking out and education ensuring that the game we love and cherish is a safe and enjoyable place for all to enjoy.

We have now implemented a strategy and approach that we believe will bring about greater change. We have clearly outlined our pillars of work; For the Fans, For the Clubs, Knowledge Centre and Campaigns. This together with

a proactive approach provides clear direction in which Level Playing Field can bring about a greater change.

Over the past 12 months we

have achieved a lot, our Weeks of Action was the biggest to date and staff have been out and about visiting clubs, Fans and DSAs to support and work together on key areas.

**OUR VISION AND AIM ARE CLEAR 'A WORLD IN WHICH ALL DISABLED FANS CAN FREELY ACCESS AND ENJOY LIVE SPORTING EVENTS.'**

Our sights are firmly set on the 2019/20 season and beyond, in how we can come together and further improve access and inclusion for all fans.



# STRATEGY OVERVIEW

## Introduction - What We Do

Level Playing Field is driven to address the current inequality of experience for disabled fans attending live sport. Whether its lack of choice, availability of tickets or a second-rate experience we use a proactive and constructive approach to tackle these and other issues.

## Why We Do What We Do

It is estimated that **50%** of disabled people haven't taken part in recreational or physical activity. The barriers why a disabled fan choose not to attend live sport can be addressed through training, raising awareness, and updating facilities and services. Last year Level Playing Field received over **500** enquiries/complaints and we aim to address these common recurring issues.



# FOR THE FANS

**For the Fans:** Is the key reason that Level Playing Field exists. As a charity we represent the views and experiences of disabled fans and we drive for an accessible and equal matchday experiences. There is a wide range of support that Level Playing Field offers fans:

**Advice and Guidance:** Our help-line is a free designated service aimed at tackling abuse, poor experience or sharing positive feedback.

**Fans Comments:** Is a platform for disabled fans to post a review of their matchday to inform other fans of facilities and experience.

**Disabled Supporters Associations (DSAs):** We offer support in setting-up DSAs and ongoing support for those already established. Our aim is to support fans and help facilitate DSAs to work with their club to enhance its service.

**Regional and National Forums:** Allows fans, DSAs and clubs to come together and raise views or enquiries, and to share best practice whilst also networking and creating partnerships.

**Fans Memberships:** Allows fans to receive key information and updates relating to accessible matchdays whilst also providing an opportunity to provide feedback.

## #AccessForAll

**STATS  
AND  
FACTS**



DSAs  
set up



Fans  
comments



Forums



DSAs –  
England &  
Wales



# FOOTBALL, ASPERGER'S AND ME - VIEW FROM THE TERRACE



Football has played a part in my life for as long as I can remember. I'm a Newcastle and Sutton United fan. I travel from London to St James' Park regularly to attend matches and have a season ticket at Sutton United's Gander Green Lane.

Growing up with Asperger's Syndrome and learning difficulties, football played a huge part in my social development. I've not always found social interaction easy but my interest in football has allowed me to make friends and build up new skills. That sense of belonging is something I value.

My Newcastle matchday will start at 6am in the morning

as I get ready to travel up to Kings Cross to get the 9am train, not usually getting home until close to midnight!

There are many reasons that football fans with Autism haven't attended a match. This is partly due to a variety of barriers; the lack of understanding from some staff, the noise in the stadium and the difficulty of using public transport.

Not everyone with Autism is the same, but I find one thing that has helped me is planning my day in advance. This is particularly helpful when attending away games where I'm less familiar to the area.

It's worth getting in touch with a club in advance to ask how they can support you. The access and development team at Level Playing Field can also offer advice and assistance, as well as contact a club on your behalf if you prefer.

If you are disabled football fan who has never attended a live match, I certainly recommend you give it a go. Quite simply, football opened my world and I hope it can do the same for you.

**Kieran Reynolds – Newcastle and Sutton United Fan.**



# Facts and

21% of the UK population has a disability. This equates to...

**13.9**  
million  
people



**8%**  
of all children



**19%**  
of working-  
age adults



**45%**  
of retirement-  
age adults

Life costs you  
**£570**  
more on average  
per month if you  
are disabled

...have a disability.



**1.2**  
UK wh  
users



# Key figures



**Disability is the largest minority group in the UK**



There are around 5000 guide dog owners in the UK



**50%** of disabled people have never attended a live entertainment or sports event



**10 million** wheelchair users



**9+ million** deaf or hard-of-hearing people in the UK

# HAVE YOUR SAY

The experience for fans going to matchdays are very diverse. There have been improvements in recent times but it's clear that more needs to be done. The disparity between attending home and away matches and variable experiences across leagues is a key area to tackle.

Fans are coming together with clubs to address improvements through their DSAs and other platforms. Speaking out about matchday experiences is vital.

If its positive it will attract more disabled fans to attend. If the comment is critical it's a piece of feedback and we have to let clubs know about any issues and give them the opportunity to address it.

We urge disabled fans to get in touch and leave comments through our website, at regional forums, by email or just by giving us a call. Please note that the correspondents can remain anonymous if preferred.

*"Had a wonderful day, the disabled supporter coach was allowed to drop off and collect right outside the ground. Inside the ground the staff were fantastic. I will be back next season."*

*Disabled Fan - Premier League*

**GET IN  
TOUCH**

 [www.levelplayingfield.org.uk](http://www.levelplayingfield.org.uk)

 [info@levelplayingfield.org.uk](mailto:info@levelplayingfield.org.uk)

 01923 545 370

 @lpftweets



# FANS COMMENTS

*“Well, what a difference a season makes!!!! My last visit was my worst experience in over 20 years with non-existent views of the pitch. On Saturday, I was delighted to see at first hand the changes that have been made. The platform itself has been raised to such a level that views were totally unobstructed even with supporters standing in front.”*

**Disabled Fan – Premier League**

*“I can’t attend away matches anymore as all fans stand and I can’t see the pitch”*

**Disabled Fan – Championship**

*“I’m sorry to say that our visit was marred by poor stewarding”*

**Disabled Fan – Premier League**

*“The stewards were very helpful and friendly. There are no refreshment facilities for away wheelchair fans. This needs looking at.”*

**Disabled Fan – Premier League**

*“We were delighted upon arrival to find that away wheelchair fans are no longer seated with home fans”*

**Disabled Fan – League 1**

# FOR THE CLUBS

**For the Clubs:** This pillar is fundamental in achieving our aim of accessible matchdays for disabled fans. It outlines the support and work we offer clubs and governing bodies. We firmly believe in adopting a proactive and constructive approach to achieve greater access and inclusion. Some of the support we have offered clubs over the past season have been:

**Expert Advice and Guidance:** Through Level Playing Field's expert staff support, advice and guidance is provided for a cross section of enquiries and/or issues clubs may face.

**Disability Access Officer round table meetings:** These proactive gatherings allow clubs to meet regionally to develop their

support network and to openly discuss best practices along with reviewing complicated situations they may have.

**Mediation:** We provide support in dealing with conflict where relationships may have broken down between fans and the club and we look to get a constructive outcome.

**Design appraisals:** We have in-house expert access auditors to provide advice and guidance on new stadia designs and updates to existing stadia. Together we work with clubs and design teams to ensure any project meets industry standards and is accessible from the beginning.

**Disability Inclusion and Etiquette training:** We offer a diverse training package for a range of different staff members at clubs. From front line staff and volunteers to Disability Access Officers and senior managers. The training looks to empower and educate staff to provide a better matchday experience for disabled fans.

## STATS AND FACTS FROM CLUBS



Access  
Audits



Design  
Appraisals



Mediations



Club Visits



Since the Premier League pledge, there has been a greater emphasis on accessibility. This action has had a positive impact with clubs across the leagues and it's important we build on the work being done across the country. We can't rest on our laurels as we are all too aware of how much still needs to be done.

Below we have set out some examples of the innovative work that clubs have carried out:

**Changing Places:** In April 2019 MK Dons launched their new changing places facility during their Weeks of Action matchday. The development was a collaborative project led by MK Dons and MK Dons Supporters Association which involved local community groups to install this great and essential facility. It is estimated that over 250,000 people across the UK require a changing places facility.



**Sensory Rooms:** Since the start of the Shippey Campaign in 2014, we have seen a growth in sensory rooms being installed

in stadia across the country both as a part of the Shippey Campaign and independently. By providing a sensory room it allows fans with Autism and fans with other sensory disabilities to access and enjoy live sport. It is estimated that there is over 1 million people with Autism in the UK and steps such as installing sensory rooms will again provide greater opportunities for fans to engage with live sport and their community.



**Sensory Packs:** Of the **1 million people** with Autism and others with sensory disabilities, not all will require the use of a sensory room to attend live sport but would benefit from a sensory pack or bag. These packs often include ear defenders, fidget spinners, guides and other useful accessories. These cost-effective packs have been popular across the country with AFC Bournemouth, Ipswich Town, Millwall FC, Oldham Athletic and Tranmere Rovers implementing this provision in 2019.

# KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

**Knowledge Centre:** The data and statistics in this sector is limited and we recognise the importance of providing insightful, relevant, quantitative and qualitative data of matchday experiences for fans and clubs. It allows for Level Playing Field to drive key policy decisions along with providing clear guidance to relevant stakeholders.

Level Playing Field already provides 'Club Pages' for all Premier League and EFL Clubs on our website. These pages provide fans with key information on relevant contact details and the accessible facilities available for disabled fans to allow better planning and a smoother matchday.

We also harness the information from forums, fans comments and general enquires and complaints to inform clubs and governing bodies along with other groups about what the matchday experience for disabled fans is really like. In 2019 Level Playing Field launched its annual 'My

Matchday Experience' survey. The surveys are available at all our forums and through mail outs within our data base to allow us to gather a broader and more impactful data pool that can again inform key decision makers and improve standards of access and inclusion.

Whilst quantitative data is important and provides a snapshot it can miss out on key details that aren't captured. Over the year we have conducted a range of fans interviews and broadcast the findings to better represent the matchday experience of disabled fans.

The screenshot shows the Arsenal club page on the Level Playing Field website. The page header includes the Level Playing Field logo, navigation links (About, Contact, Join, News, Membership), and buttons for 'HAVE YOUR SAY' and 'DONATE'. The main content area features the Arsenal crest, club name, league (Premier League), stadium (Emirates Stadium), and capacity (60,161). It also includes a 'Club website' link and social media icons. A 'Disabled supporters contact' section provides contact details for Alun Francis, Disability Access Officer, including email (afrancis@arsenal.co.uk), phone (0207 704 4492), and a disability information line (020 7619 5050). Other contact sections include 'General ticket office contact' (boxoffice@arsenal.co.uk, 0344 277 3625) and 'Accessible ticket contact' (Caroline Lemmon / Jacquie Pollard, Disability Liaison Team, disability@arsenal.co.uk, 020 7619 5050, open Mon-Fri 9.30am to 5.00pm). A 'Disabled supporters association' section lists Anne Hyde and arsenaldsa@btinternet.com. A sidebar on the right contains a 'Have you got a question, comment or complaint?' section and an 'About this page' section.



Level  
Playing  
Field

For disabled s

# Weeks of Action

For disabled sports fans





# CAMPAIGNS

The Weeks of Action 2019 was the most successful campaign to date. Level Playing Field have never had as many Clubs, Disabled Supporters Associations (DSA's), fans, and other organisations taking part.

**Message from Chair:** “Our Weeks of Action are key to breaking down barriers and improving the overall match day experience for disabled fans. The Weeks of Action have allowed us to champion and celebrate the good work that’s done by clubs, fans and DSA’s throughout England and Wales providing and inclusive matchday experience and support for their communities.”

“Sport has a unique power to bring people together and we are pleased to see the impact of this year’s campaign. Clubs, Fans, DSA’s and governing bodies have certainly gone that extra mile in making this our biggest and most successful campaign to date! Thank you to everyone who participated.”

**WOA 19’ highlight:** Wolves took part in multiple Weeks of Action

activities. The players raised awareness by warming up in Level Playing Field campaign t-shirts. The stand out moment came when Jack Smith announced the team on his new ‘Black Country accent’ voice assisted technology, which was later broadcast on BBC’s ‘One Show’.

## On the up!



increase in visits from LPF staff, trustees and ambassadors



increase in EFL clubs

## Who took part?



Clubs and DSA's



Partners

## Social media numbers



impressions



**Sport plays an integral part in society today and attending live matches more often than not provides a positive impact on an individual's life, we caught up with lifelong Trotters fan and new Level Playing Field ambassador Morgan Parry.**

**Q) What's the most enjoyable part about your matchday?**

For home games Bolton have a special elevated seating position for wheelchair users which has spaces for about 30 fans and their carers. The space is behind glass and you get an uninterrupted view of the game and protection from the bad weather.

**Q) What are the positive things your club does to make your matchday as inclusive and enjoyable as possible?**

Bolton have a positive attitude to fans with all disabilities. They've arranged for the official supporters coach company to make a wheelchair coach available, they help to book my

away match tickets so I don't have to remember to call the ticket office, and they organise pitch side events and help you meet your favourite footballers.

**Q) If you could give any advice to a disabled fan who hasn't yet attended a live football match, what would you say?**

Go with friends or your family. Find a team you want to support through thick and thin. Contact your club's Disability Access Officer and Disabled Supporters Association.

**WEEKS OF ACTION**  
**SAVE THE DATE**

Level Playing Field  
Weeks of Action  
For disabled sports fans

**Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> February**  
to  
**Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> March**

# HOW TO GET INVOLVED

## MEMBERSHIP

### OVERVIEW AND BENEFITS

As a user led organisation, our members are always at the heart of what we do. Their shared passion for sport and equality really drives us to influence long term change and improve the spectator experience for all disabled fans.

Level Playing Field offer a range of free memberships. These are available to anyone who wishes to support and follow the work we do to 'promote good access for all fans' at sports venues across England and Wales.

**There are 3 membership options available: Fan Membership, DSA Membership and Club Governing Body and other Organisation Membership.**

Benefits include a regular newsletter to keep you up to date with all the latest Level Playing Field news specific to your membership option, access to independent, expert advice and guidance on access and

inclusion issues, opportunities to feedback on Access and Inclusion through Level Playing Field's annual survey, invites to take part in Level Playing Field events such as our annual Weeks of Action, opportunities to network with other disabled fans, fan groups and disability/sports organisations, use of 'Level Playing Field Membership Logo' and an official membership certificate.

To benefit from our FREE membership visit:

[www.levelplayingfield.org.uk/join](http://www.levelplayingfield.org.uk/join)





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# CEO REPORT

Owain Davies

Looking back over the past twelve months we have been busy working with fans, DSAs and clubs tackling some key issues and listening to feedback. The team we have at Level Playing Field deserves a lot of credit and I'm proud of their achievements.

This period has allowed our new strategy to bed in and we are pleased with the initial results. Our focus is firmly set on working collaboratively to gain success involving all stakeholders to achieve our vision, **'A world in which all disabled fans can freely access and enjoy live sporting events'**.

In 2019 our Weeks of Action campaign continued to push the agenda of access and inclusion. It was the biggest to date with more clubs, DSAs and organisations signing up and taking the opportunity to shine a light on what's being done well. We must set our sights on the next twelve months and beyond, whilst we hear and experience the positive

work taking place across the country we cannot rest until disabled fans have an equal and inclusive experience when attending live sport.

We are committed and passionate about achieving our vision and working together with fans, clubs, DSAs and governing bodies we will continue to do this and make a difference.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to thank our passionate Board of Trustees who embody the vision we are aiming to achieve. Our funders, The Premier League Fans Fund and the EFL, thank you for your continued support and importantly to the fans and DSAs we couldn't do this without your commitment and passion.

**#AccessForAll**



A large crowd of people at a sports event, many holding flags, with a central white box containing text.

***“We cannot  
rest until  
disabled fans  
have an equal  
and inclusive  
experience when  
attending  
live sport”***





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