

Football Memories Project goes from strength to strength



It is a chilling statistic, but over 84,000 people in Scotland have a diagnosis of dementia, which is the equivalent of every spectator on an average Scottish football weekend.

Many of those affected have short term memory problems, but are able to recall events from the past with some clarity, and recognising this, a joint project between Alzheimer Scotland and the Scottish Football Museum at Hampden Park, helps men with dementia by reviving memories of players, matches, goals and incidents from football matches in their younger days.

Both Hibs and Hearts are involved in this worthwhile project which has attracted considerable interest and involvement from fans and players alike, whilst the website www.footballmemories.org.uk has seen contributions of stories from footballers, rock stars, film actors, journalists, politicians and ordinary supporters all across the country.

To date nearly fifty Football Memories groups have been established across Scotland, from the Shetland Isles in the north to Stranraer in the south, where people with dementia and other memory problems gather to enjoy looking back at old photos and memorabilia.

Several key people in Scottish Football have been only too willing to become supporters, including Hibs' greats Lawrie Reilly and Peter Cormack, and former Hearts stars Craig Levein and Sandy Jardine who have given their backing to the project.

Others include Sir Alex Ferguson, Craig Brown, Andy Roxburgh, Billy Stark and Willie Miller.

The work is also backed by the Scottish Professional Footballers Association, the Scottish League Managers and Coaches Association and the Scottish Highland League.

The level of detail in the recall of the men attending can be quite spectacular, and the project aims to record many of the stories which emerge for future use and to avoid part of the nation's football heritage being lost forever. Images kept in scrapbooks and albums are shared and downloaded for use in sessions. Many players and supporters are helped to create Memory Books, illustrating their own careers and experiences.

The production of Legends Cards has started and it is hoped to have a set of 60 cards on every club covering the period from 1945 to 1978. Images and collections are being made available online to those who join the Football Memories League and there have been enquiries from expatriate Scots and their families. The project is based on volunteer involvement and the Football Memories team train volunteers to deliver sessions in their own communities. The people using the service meet in Day Centres, Community Halls and in Care Homes and Hospitals.

The Football Memories team are more than happy to share their experiences with others interested in developing this project in their own countries or Football Associations.

The project was launched two years ago and trains volunteers to spend time with people with dementia who have an interest in football, talking about teams and matches from the past and working with images and memorabilia to stimulate memories. The project is a partnership between Alzheimer Scotland and the Scottish Football Museum, and is supported by the players of the People's Postcode Lottery and BUPA Care Homes.

So far, hundreds of people with dementia have benefitted from

the programme, and a number of relatives have expressed their gratitude to everyone involved. One woman told the organisers:- "I drive here with a man with dementia and I return with my husband," whilst another said: "It's the only time I hear him speak. I can't believe that's him doing all that talking. He doesn't say anything at home except yes and no."

Project manager Michael White told the Edinburgh Reporter: - "The level of recall is simply amazing. You have to see it to really appreciate the change. The men are relaxed, happy and the humour is incredible. We always come away laughing at some of the stories we hear. We are learning about aspects of the Scottish game that haven't been in any books and the first-hand accounts are priceless.

"It's a simple concept but it is hugely effective and is helping so many people all across Scotland. Football Memories has been supported by all the leading bodies in Scottish Football and hopefully we will be able to build on the success of the first year. The financial support of BUPA and the Peoples Postcode Lottery have made this possible and we have gone from three groups to almost fifty in a space of 12 months.

"Our volunteers are amazing and their willingness to get involved shows their commitment and enthusiasm."

