



Festive Friends

Christmas 2023 Report



spfltrust.org.uk/festivefriends

Welcome

In a year where the cost-of-living crisis continued to affect many throughout Scotland, it was important for us to spread Christmas cheer to those who may have been experiencing social-isolation throughout the festive period.

We know the power of football in Scotland. Research shows that if you live within ten miles of an SPFL ground you are three times more likely to experience poverty. Because of this, associated community trusts and SPFL clubs (ATCs) are well positioned to create positive change.

Festive Friends is a real highlight in the calendar of the SPFL Trust and our colleagues at ATCs. Quite simply, it's about bringing staff, volunteers and communities together to deliver magic.

And over the last eight years of the programme we have supported a remarkable **21,764** people.

This year, encouraged ATCs to focus on in-stadium events, putting the experience of coming together at the forefront of the Festive Friends programme.

In 2023, we reached 5209 people through Festive Friends, with 40 clubs taking part in the initiative, filling stadiums with joy and delivering Christmas hampers for those who needed it most throughout the festive period.

Read on to learn more about how we worked with clubs and partners to deliver another impactful Festive Friends programme.

Coming home for Christmas



What is Festive Friends?

40 clubs
took part
in 2023

Festive Friends is a project created and funded by the SPFL Trust which aims to engage and support those across our communities who are socially-isolated over the festive period. Placed at the very heart of communities, SPFL clubs are able to tackle social isolation by bringing Christmas magic and, importantly, companionship to older people who may otherwise face the festive season alone.

ATCs work closely with local partners, such as social work departments and third-sector organisations, to identify older people in need and put plans in place to send some festive cheer their way.

In 2023, Festive Friends participants either received a hamper filled with food, festive goodies and games or were invited into their local ground for a traditional Christmas dinner, entertainment, Christmas gifts and, most importantly, great company. Some were involved in both!

Who is Festive Friends for?

Older people who are at risk of social-isolation and are referred to clubs by local organisations.

Watch our explainer animation



We held our own Festive Friends event at Hampden, delivering to 35 older people.



Festive Friends in numbers

Clubs involved:
40

Total number of participants:
5,209

Oldest participant:
101 years old

Total number of hampers sent:
2,393
(41% male, 45% female, 14% did not disclose)

Total number of participants who attended an in person event:
2,816
(56% male, 44% female)

Total number of participants who lived alone:
1,179

Total number of participants with caring responsibilities:
677

Total number of volunteers:
685

Total number of volunteer hours:
3,322

Total number of local partners involved:
180



Thank you!

Without the support of ATC staff, volunteers, donors and local partners, Festive Friends would not be the successful programme it is today. We thank everyone involved for helping us spread Christmas cheer to those in our communities who are at risk of social isolation.

180
referral agencies were involved, including NHS, food banks and regional support services.

65%
of participants came from the three areas with the highest index of multiple deprivation in Scotland.*



The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) generously donated to our Festive Friends fund, once again. SFRS staff also assisted at events at clubs across the country.



Funding

Total: £112,150
£77,522 on in-person delivery
34,62 on Hampers



We are grateful to the SPFL for providing funding towards Festive Friends.

*Based on 4,063 participants, as 1,146 did not disclose.

The stories behind the numbers

Queen's Park

Alan

Alan was referred to Queen's Park through Glasgow's social work department. He lives alone and is at risk of experiencing loneliness.

Staff and volunteers at Queen's Park supported Alan, and after learning about his lack of confidence when it comes to travelling alone on public transport, ensured that alternative arrangements were made so he could attend.

Throughout the day, Alan wore an infectious smile and enjoyed the card games, the meal, and being surrounded by his peers at his local club.



We visited Motherwell FC Community Trust to see their event at Fir Park

Click here to watch



Kathleen

" I can't believe you have done all of this for us. I don't get out much at all, I was nervous about coming and this is the only event I'll have been to over the festivities. I've really enjoyed myself and meeting new people. I loved spending time with the children and the meal was excellent, thank you for inviting me. "

Kathleen, Festive Friends participant, Queen's Park

St Johnstone

Fiona

Fiona's husband was a lifelong St. Johnstone supporter. Sadly, Fiona lost her husband suddenly in 2023 and she now lives alone and has no family.

Christmas 2023 was going to be the first Christmas she had spent alone, until she was nominated by a neighbour to attend Festive Friends with Saints in the Community, which was a lovely surprise for her.



Mary-Ann and John

Mary-Ann was invited to attend Festive Friends at McDiarmid Park with her husband John. John had been in hospital with a blood clot on his lung and was only just out of hospital.

They are both 83 and just celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary, but as John was in hospital, they could not do anything to celebrate.

Their invite to our Festive Friends meal was their celebration and they both had a great day.

" Thank you so much for having my parents Mary-Ann and John to your Festive Friends meal. They were full of chat about their lovely meal and the 'braw Saints players' who laughed along with them at the table, and I believe one or two were up for a dance. "

Mary-Ann and John's daughter



Queen of the South

Sandra*

Queen of the South delivered a hamper to a 96-year-old participant, after being referred via Summerhill Community Centre.



She lives alone, and although she has a lot of family, a lot of them live down in London, so it can be a lonely time over the festive period. She answered the door wearing a large coat and there were no lights on in the house.

The face of delight was clear to see and she was happy to receive a hamper full of goodies.

Both players and community staff were invited in for a cup of tea and a chat that went on for about 15 minutes at the doorway, talking through Christmas, family and all things Queens from pre and post war time.

She is still active and attends the community centre at Summerhill. Despite living alone, she is certainly not socially-isolated anymore with a great group around her at the community centre and now at the football club.

*Sandra is not the participants real name



Dundee

Graham

Graham lives alone in sheltered housing in Dundee. Until recently, he wouldn't leave his accommodation.



He was invited to Dundee's Festive Friends event but expressed that he was anxious about attending as he didn't know anyone else that was going.

When delivering festive hampers to the sheltered accommodation, two days before the in-person event, staff from Dundee paid Graham a visit. He was assured that he would be looked after, and that he would be sat with people who have similar interests to him.

Graham agreed that he would come along and is so glad he did. He had a great time and was last to leave!



Arbroath

Frank

Arbroath FC Community Trust were first introduced to Frank at an Arbroath fixture at Gayfield, where he has been a season ticket holder for many a year.



Frank, who lives in a small village just outside Arbroath, was the eldest Festive Friends attendee at Arbroath, in his late 70s.

Last year, Frank went through the bereavement of his wife who sadly passed away. Shortly after this his dog, which was a dementia dog for his wife, also passed.

This began a sharp decline in Frank's mental and physical health, as he became isolated with no family nearby.

When the hamper was delivered, staff and volunteers were invited in for a cup of tea, and Frank spoke for an hour about his running career, his wife and dog.

It was clear he hadn't spoken to someone in a while. It was very heartwarming.

Frank was invited to the Festive Friends in-person event at Gayfield, which he attended with his neighbour. They were both brilliant on the day, and Frank loved spending time with the guide dogs at the event!

Frank has been invited along to the next cohort of The Changing Room, and now has a strong group of people looking out for him. Festive Friends has really helped open doors to building bonds like these.

“Thank you very much for this, I feel really happy to have come along. I will remember this day for a long time!”

Frank, Arbroath FC participant





Could you support Festive Friends?

Every year our Festive Friends programme is oversubscribed and we are unable to support as many people as we would hope.

If you or your organisation would like to support more people in need, please get in touch.

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