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Festive Friends

Christmas 2024 Report

spfltrust.org.uk/festivefriends

A family welcome in Perth

Norma doesn't leave the house much.

In fact, she has been largely housebound for a while. She has Parkinson's Disease, which means she has trouble eating and talking. It has been a real struggle for Norma, and her deteriorating health and feelings of loneliness have weighed heavy on her.

Despite that, she has shown incredible resilience, even recovering from a coma after serious brain injury.

After receiving a call from Saints in the Community inviting her to their Festive Friends event at McDiarmid Park, Norma was really hesitant to go.

She wasn't used to socialising.

To the surprise of her delighted daughters, Norma did make the trip to the stadium, and we're just as pleased as her daughters that she did.

"I honestly can't find the words to thank you for the phone call inviting Mum to Festive Friends. Never in a million years did I think she would go," one daughter said.

"She doesn't leave the house, so this was a humongous achievement.

"Not only did we get her out of the house, but she listened and joined in conversations, ate a nutritious meal and had fun. These are the basics of everyday life, yet mum hasn't participated in these for many years.

"I am truly humbled by the kindness, attentiveness and utter joy all the staff showed at the Christmas lunch chatting with the invitees. The magic of the Christmas spirit was there in abundance."



Keep reading to discover how we worked alongside ATCs* and partners to deliver another memorable and impactful Festive Friends programme.



A word from our CEO

2024 was a year where many in our communities faced multiple challenges.

However, our network of SPFL associated trusts and clubs (ATCs) tackled them head on, and we were delighted to see them spreading festive joy throughout the country for the whole of December.

We understand the unique role that football plays in Scotland. ATCs within our network are perfectly positioned to create meaningful, positive change.

Festive Friends is a standout initiative in the SPFL Trust's calendar, supported by staff, volunteers, and ATCs across the country. It's about uniting communities and spreading magic during the holiday season.

Over the last nine years, the programme has made an extraordinary impact, **providing over 26,000 meals in that time.**

In 2024, we reached over 5,200 people living in social isolation, with 37 clubs participating. Stadiums were once more filled with cheer, and Christmas hampers were delivered to those who needed them the most.

Inviting people along to stadiums does more than give them festive joy, however. It's about building connections and opening conversations. ATCs can provide support in many situations, signposting participants to other programmes and local organisations, using a 'No Wrong Door' approach at their stadium.

Our thanks go to the 37 participating ATCs and the wealth of partners who supported the Festive Friends initiative in 2024.



Nicky Reid, Chief Executive Officer

We are grateful to the SPFL for providing **£25,000** of funding for Festive Friends



We reached over 5,200 people living in social isolation



What is Festive Friends?

Festive Friends is a project created and funded by the SPFL Trust and SPFL which aims to engage and support those across our communities who are socially-isolated over the festive period.

Located in the very heart of communities, ATCs are able to tackle social isolation by bringing festive magic and, importantly, companionship to older people who may otherwise face the festive season alone.

ATCs work closely with local strategic 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 2024, participants of Festive Friends were either given a hamper filled with delicious food, festive treats, and fun games, or invited to their local stadium for a traditional Christmas dinner, lively entertainment, thoughtful gifts, and, above all, wonderful company.



Watch our explainer animation



Who is Festive Friends for?

People over the age of 50 who are at risk of experiencing loneliness and are referred to clubs by local organisations, or members of the public.



Who delivered Festive Friends in 2024?

37 ATCs delivered Festive Friends in 2024



We visited East Fife's Festive Friends event in 2024



Jo

"This is so special to me, if I wasn't here I would be alone in the house."

Jo, Festive Friends participant, Big Hearts



Stella

"The event was a real credit to everyone involved in the Cove Rangers FC Community Foundation. If the foundation was in a league it would be at the top."

Stella, participant, Cove Rangers Community Foundation



Glenda

"The afternoon was super and it was so nice to be included. I don't get out much, so it was good to reconnect with familiar faces and meet new ones. I don't often leave the house, and it felt good to get out, especially as my health isn't the best, and I can sometimes feel down."

Glenda, participant, Forfar Community Football Foundation



Festive Friends in numbers



Over
26,000
meals have been
provided since 2016

Clubs involved:

37

Total number of
participants:

5,226

Oldest participant:

102 years old

Total number
of hampers sent:

2,323

(46% male, 54% female)

Total
number of
participants who
attended an in
person event:

2,903

(53% male,
47% female)

Total number of
participants who
lived alone:

2,583

Total number
of participants
with caring
responsibilities:

595

Total number
of participants
engaged for the
first time:

2,612

Total number of
volunteers:

680

Total number of
volunteer hours:

3,252

165

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

91

organisations donated items towards
Festive Friends delivery at their local club.



Bringing the magic

Gemma

Montrose Community Trust

Gemma has faced severe mental health struggles in recent years. After moving to Montrose four years ago, she experienced deep isolation following the loss of her partner and was unable to care for her child.

She first connected with Montrose Community Trust through walking groups, which provided a supportive space to rebuild trust and form relationships. This led her to come along to Festive Friends, which she described as a lifeline.

The warmth of the volunteers, the festive meal, and the sense of belonging gave her a much-needed boost.

With the support of Montrose Community Trust, Gemma has built a vital support network, helping her manage challenges and enhance her overall wellbeing.

Chris

“ Our Festive Friends programme this year truly captured the spirit of togetherness and community, creating an unforgettable experience for all involved. ”

Chris Platt - CEO, Montrose Community Trust



Mr G

Ayr United Football Academy

Mr G is 90 years of age and lives alone. He is recently widowed.

He was nominated for Festive Friends by his granddaughter, a long-term volunteer at Ayr United FC.

The joy on Mr G's face as local school children performed festive songs and dances was truly heartwarming. After the event, he expressed deep gratitude to his granddaughter and the Academy, saying how much he enjoyed the afternoon - getting out, socialising, and meeting new people.



Ronnie

Dundee FC Community Trust



Ronnie is a lifelong Dundee fan who lives in a high-rise flat in the city and uses a wheelchair. Though his disability prevents him from attending matches, he follows the team with unwavering dedication.

When two of his favourite players arrived at his door with a Festive Friends hamper, it made his year.

He was thrilled not only by the surprise but by the players' kindness in sitting down to chat about the club he loves.

Ronnie told them that more social interaction, getting out the house and getting back to Dens Park would make a huge difference in his life. To his delight, the players arranged tickets for Ronnie to come to a home game this season.

Dundee FC Community Trust are now working with Ronnie to make sure he can get back to doing what he loves in a place that feels like home.



Ronald

St Mirren FC Charitable Foundation



Ronald recently lost his wife of 50 years, and he has been struggling with grief.

He now lives alone and was referred to St Mirren FC Charitable Foundation by Renfrewshire Council's Sheltered Housing Team due to his isolation.

Two of their event volunteers were deeply moved by his story. After attending Festive Friends, Ronald invited them in for a cup of tea, and they spent over an hour chatting about his wife and his life.

Grateful for the company, Ronald later shared how much he enjoyed his meal - especially the turkey and pigs in blankets - and appreciated his gifts, which fit perfectly.

Alan

Motherwell Community Trust



Alan was nominated by his church to attend Festive Friends for the first time this year.

In the later years of his life, he was part of a close-knit trio of friends who enjoyed playing bowls and sharing a pint together.

Tragically, he lost both of his companions in 2024, leaving him feeling down and at a loose end.

When he came to Festive Friends, he quickly embraced the warmth of the event, posing for photos with his new tablemates. It was a heartening and positive conclusion to what had been a challenging year for Alan.

John

Spartans Community Foundation

John has recently been housed in the area after a period of homelessness.

Though he doesn't have much, he is working hard to rebuild his life and is eager to become more involved in the local community, especially as he struggles with social isolation and mental health challenges.

The team at Spartans Community Foundation paid him a visit at home, delivering him a Christmas hamper filled with treats, which he was delighted with.

John was also gifted a complimentary Spartans FC season ticket, which he was overjoyed to receive.

Following this visit, John has shown an interest in joining other groups at Spartans Community Foundation, as he looks to build connections and improve his mental health.



Mrs Green

East Fife Community Football Club

Mrs. Green was invited to the Festive Friends event at East Fife as she regularly attends a Warm Space project in the community.

At 91 years old, she enjoys visiting the Warm Space to meet others, have a blether, and share a meal. She was delighted to meet new people at the Festive Friends event, as she doesn't get out much.

She was especially thrilled to be picked up in an adapted car for her wheelchair, and that there was a lift to get her upstairs.

For Mrs. Green, Festive Friends was a special treat, and an opportunity to be out and about rather than spending the day at home alone.







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