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## THE SPORTING CHANCE

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# NEWSLETTER

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## CEO Colin Bland's New Year Report

WELCOME everyone – clients, stakeholders, staff and all those who take a keen interest in Sporting Chance – to a new year, one which promises to see the charity developing in a variety of areas and thus able to keep satisfying the growing need for our services.

First, we have been delighted to be asked to contribute to the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's Review and Action Plan designed to address 'Mental Health in the Elite Sport Population in England.'

We hope that our 19 years of experience in delivering mental health and emotional wellbeing services directly to professional sport will complement and enhance the good work that has been started here.

In addition, our Education Department, led by Alex Mills, is rolling out our first deliveries to professional cricket on behalf of the Professional Cricketers' Association.

There are some changes in the education department with Jeff Whitley having departed to take up a player welfare role with our highly valued stakeholders, the Professional Footballers Association. Our thanks go to Jeff, as can be seen later in this publication, for his great service.

I know Alex is introducing new workshops and speakers – and you can find out more about him in our 'Meet The Staff' feature in this Newsletter – and he will be taking a new group of people to share their experience, strength and hope with him to our seminars.

Our Founder and Chair of Trustees Tony Adams went with Alex to Northamptonshire and Leicestershire before Christmas in our first sessions for and with the PCA, as also reported in this Newsletter, and also to Worcestershire in January.

Our experience of working with the PCA has been exceptionally positive. As an organisation, they embody all that we stand for in their professional and confidential approach to player welfare.

We may be sad to lose Jeff but we are delighted to have recruited two new members to the Sporting Chance team. Craig Dexter and Barry Trott are both long term experienced therapists and will enhance the internal expertise of the charity.

Our vision to be the best that we can be and provide the best possible service to our stakeholders and individuals who need support has taken a step forward.

Elsewhere in the Newsletter you will also read about the return of our golf day that took a break last year due to many of our supporters being away at the football World Cup.

Please save the date – Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> June. This is a lovely day of golf and friendship in the delightful setting of the beautiful Foxhills club in Surrey. I look forward to seeing you there.



# A day at the Cricket...

## Tony and Alex visit Northampton and Leicester



As part of our new partnership with the Professional Cricketers' Association, Head of Education Alex Mills and Sporting Chance Founder Tony Adams delivered absorbing seminars to Northamptonshire and Leicestershire County Cricket Clubs.

Alex began with an illustrated in-depth talk about the warning signs of addiction and mental health issues and how they can affect professional sports people, along with how and where to get help. He was followed by Tony powerfully sharing his own experiences from his career and his sobriety.

Afterwards, there was an honest question-and-answer session, with time also for individual players to consult with Alex and Tony. "It was an excellent day," said Tony. "The players were really engaged and we got great feedback. I'm looking forward to doing more of them with other counties."

Our thanks go to Charlie Mulraine, the PCA's Personal Development and Welfare Officer for facilitating the two sessions.



Tony and Alex at Leicestershire County Cricket Club

## Golf Day 2019

The Sporting Chance Golf Day for 2019 has been booked for Foxhills Golf Club in Surrey for Tuesday June 4th.

Teams of four are invited and full details and pricing can be obtained by emailing [alan.sykes9@btinternet.com](mailto:alan.sykes9@btinternet.com).



This is always a great day out at a beautiful venue, attended by Tony Adams and guests from our stakeholders, and includes bacon rolls and tea and coffee in the morning followed by a delicious three-course meal in the evening.

# Patrons and trustees night at the Emirates Stadium

OUR first Patrons and Trustees Night saw a dozen brave souls shrug off the cold at the Arsenal v Qarabaq Europa League match in December, thanks to Tony's generous hosting of a hospitality box at the Emirates Stadium. As well as Patrons Kate Hoey MP and Tony Smith, Trustee



Graham Ball was also in attendance, along with various other friends of the charity, including Alan Sykes, who is organising our golf day this year, Lincoln Elias and Paul Edwards.

Our CEO Colin Bland welcomed everyone to what is hoped will become an annual event where those who give their time and expertise to the charity can reconnect and hear about the work we are doing. Colin outlined the achievements of the year and our success in attracting new stakeholders, thus reaching more sportsmen and women with addiction and mental health issues who may need to access our services of one-to-one counselling or residential treatment.

"It was an excellent evening," said Colin. "The food and company was great and it was good to get people together again to discuss the charity, its work and how we can all work together next year. Here's looking forward to the next one."



# Farewell and thanks to Jeff

SPORTING CHANCE would like to thank our departing Head of Education Jeff Whitley for his sterling service with our charity and wish him well as he takes up a similar education and player welfare role with our key stakeholder, the Professional Footballers' Association.

Jeff was a player for many years with Manchester City, coming up through the youth ranks, and made 120 appearances for the first team from 1996 to 2003, including winning promotion to the Premier League.

He then went on to Sunderland, where he was part of the team that was promoted to the Premier League in 2005, before finishing his career with Cardiff City. The Zambian-born midfield player also won 20 caps with Northern Ireland, the land of his father's birth.

It was while at Cardiff that Jeff acknowledged his alcohol and drug problem and sought the help of Sporting Chance. Once clean and sober, he trained as a counsellor and for more than six years has delivered high-quality education days to sports clubs and organisations on behalf of our charity.

Said Sporting Chance Chief Executive Colin Bland: "Jeff has been an excellent Head of Education and all those sports people who have attended his talks and sessions would surely testify to that.

"The PFA know they are getting a top operator and we wish him well in his role. We also look forward to working with Jeff in the future, continuing our great partnership and relationship with the PFA."

In Jeff's place, our Education Officer Alex Mills will now take on the lead role at our education seminars, backed by a variety of speakers including Sporting Chance Founder and Chair of Trustees Tony Adams.



# Meet the Staff....

## Alex Mills

### Can you describe your role with Sporting Chance for us?

I've always worked in the Education Department since joining Sporting Chance in 2016 and I became Head of Education at the beginning of this year.

It's a role that's previously been held by Andrew Jordan - who is now the senior therapist in our residential clinic - and until recently by Jeff Whitley who I worked alongside before his move to the PFA to take up a post within their welfare department.

I know just how good they were from seeing them first-hand and hearing our clients' feedback on their sessions so I've certainly got big shoes to fill.

### What does the job involve?

The Education Department delivers a range of seminars to academy squads, first teams, non-playing staff, governing bodies and other stakeholders across the sporting sector.

We'll engage with over 1,500 individuals over the course of this year, more than any other part of the charity, so when we do get in front of an audience it's really important we make it count.

We educate to prevent problems arising where we can and signpost to appropriate treatment in case we can't. I create tailored content on various topics from academy-focused 'lifestyle' pieces to recreational drug use to counselling techniques for welfare staff.

I work with key personnel in clubs and other stakeholders to bring together content that works for them and I'll then source the right person to de-



liver or co-facilitate, usually a former player who has lived experience of a specific issue or a member of our therapeutic team.

### **Your role has obviously expanded along with the charity, can you describe how?**

Knowing that Jeff was moving on at the end of last year, we needed to look at what we wanted from our education provision going forward and how best to put that in place.

Although on paper I've taken up Jeff's role, I'm hardly a like-for-like replacement; Jeff played over 100 games for Man City and I couldn't have got in my school team even if they were a man short.

Both him and Andrew are former professional footballers who developed really impactful, engaging seminars which combined their own experience of the game and their path into addiction and recovery.

In many ways the need for that hasn't changed and a big part of my job will be to seek out and develop more men and women just like them who have lived through addiction or problems with their mental health or emotional wellbeing and can talk about how therapy helped them.

What is changing? Clients want more specific content across a wider range of audiences and the sector is becoming more competitive due to an influx of new providers so we're constantly having to review content and research new material and techniques to keep our message fresh and relevant.

### **Can you describe a typical day or is there no such thing?**

No, lots of travelling, two things rarely the same. It's very much a 'pinch me' job. Sometimes you'll get to a weekend and look back and think 'Did I just do that?'

### **How do you see the future for yourself and the charity?**

Sporting Chance has been delivering education from its inception, I know Tony (Adams) talks about visiting lots of different clubs in the early days of the charity alongside our first CEO, Peter Kay, and as I've already mentioned, that baton has been taken up by some high-calibre people along the way, all with first-hand experience of our residential clinic and a powerful message of recovery.

It's an incredible legacy to inherit at a time when the landscape of welfare provision in professional sport is evolving rapidly. The messages we deliver and the way we deliver them need to reflect that whilst staying true to what we are. I'm looking forward to the challenge!