

PRESS RELEASE

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BEGINS

Unveiled – Aston Villa Kit to help life limited children

The new kit from Premiership Football team Aston Villa bearing the logo of Acorns Children's Hospice in the shirt sponsor spot was unveiled today (Monday 7th July) in Brindleyplace, Central Birmingham. Children and families who use the life-line care services provided by Acorns were present to see Villa's current playing stars proudly unveil the new kit.

The country's children's hospices face challenges in raising funds to keep them operational on a daily basis. A three-year emergency Government grant for children's hospices was given in 2006, just at a time when Acorns was forced to close beds due to insufficient funding. This emergency funding helped to reopen closed hospice beds at Acorns and care for around 600 life limited children and their families.

The Government has allocated a further £20 million for children's hospices until 2011. Whilst this is welcome by children's hospices, they are seeking long-term funding as they currently have to raise approximately 80% of their income themselves.

It has taken a regional football club to understand the urgent appeal of its local children's hospice that is trying to reach 1,000 life limited children and their families living in its region, who urgently need help. Aston Villa FC has stepped in with a partnership aimed at creating increased awareness to help Acorns highlight this and how children's hospices have to fundraise most of their income from the public.

Aston Villa Football Club announced the unique partnership with Acorns last month at a special press conference at Villa Park. The move is believed to be the first time that a Premiership Football team has given away its top sponsor spot to a charity. By announcing that Acorns would take the coveted place of a sponsor, Villa handed a massive awareness-building tool to the local children's hospice that it simply would not be able to fund through traditional advertising. The offer could not have come at a better time as Acorns embarks on its three-year strategic programme to extend its services to reach these extra 1,000 life limited children and their families.

Overnight the announcement helped to open the eyes of audiences across the globe to the important work of Acorns and the country's other children's hospices that provide vital services but which have suffered from inaccurate perceptions for too long, for example 'a children's hospice is simply where children go to die', whereas in reality children's hospices promote living well to the end of life. Children's hospices provide much-needed care to the child outside of acute care provided in hospitals. The Acorns-Villa announcement has been positively received around the world; even rival football fans from Birmingham City FC have given the move their full support.

Speaking about the Aston Villa partnership, David Strudley, Acorns' Chief Executive, said: "Acorns is desperately trying to raise the funds it needs to support the children we currently care for but at the same time we know that there are more than one thousand more children across our region who need our help. We must make more people aware of our work and this urgent need to help these very sick children and young people.

"This groundbreaking partnership between two like-minded organisations who share the same values is a great way for us to open more doors. Aston Villa has become increasingly aware of Acorns' need to extend its care services to many more children and families and that Acorns care costs will rise from £6m to nearer £9m over the next three years to achieve its strategic objectives.

"This partnership will help our fundraising as more people become aware of who we are and what we do, and it will help us to find those additional families who so desperately need our services. This partnership is good for Birmingham and the people of the West Midlands.

"We hope that it will encourage other local businesses to put their thinking caps on and approach us with other ways in which they can help and offer support."

Aston Villa has supported Acorns behind the scenes for the last few years and more publicly over the last 18 months and have so far has covered the cost of 230 days of hospice care at one of Acorns' three specialist units.

Acorns offers specialist nursing and short break stays to seriously ill children living with incurable illnesses. Tailored care and support is available to the whole family at every stage. Most of the children who use Acorns will not reach adulthood and often require care, 24 hours a day – seven days a week. Acorns is the only provider of its type offering round the clock care for families.

Acorns make no charge to the children and families who use its services, but needs £4,500 per day per hospice to provide its vital services. Acorns runs three specialist children's hospices across the West Midlands, these are: Acorns in Birmingham – located in Selly Oak; Acorns in the Black Country – located in Walsall; and Acorns for the Three Counties – located in Worcester.

To find out more about Acorns and its partnership with Aston Villa, please visit www.acorns.org.uk/astonvilla

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* Figures provided by ACT (Association for Children's Palliative Care)

For press information, please contact: Monica Wharton, Head of Marketing and Communications, tel: 01564 825061; mobile 07970 457376 or Melanie Hinds, Acorns Press Officer, tel: 01564 825063; mobile: 07971 913042; email: melanie.hinds@acorns.org.uk or Derek Weekes, Acorns Press Officer, tel: 01564 825062; mobile: 07966 463 687; email: derek.weekes@acorns.org.uk

Notes to editors:

Due to the sensitive nature of Acorns care services it refrains from using the words 'terminal' in its press releases and public communications, preferring to use the words 'life limited' or 'life limiting' instead. Acorns children have a lot of living to do, and the terms 'life limited' and 'life limiting' are commonly used in the Children's Hospice movement and Paediatric Palliative Care communications. Acorns kindly requests that you respect this in your own press coverage of Acorns Children's Hospice. Thank you.

Acorns offer life limited children and their families a network of care, at its hospices in Selly Oak, Walsall and Worcester, and through its community team who offer support at home. Children can stay at the hospices for short breaks, emergency and end-of-life care. The community team give support to the whole family 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including practical and emotional support for parents, special help for siblings and bereavement counselling.

Acorns Children's Hospice has become a leading light in the hospice movement for its innovative developments.

Developments to improve care include introducing specialist workers and teams dedicated to giving the very best support for all, including: siblings; adolescents; grandparents and black and minority ethnic families.

Acorns Children's Hospice has a deep commitment to working alongside colleagues in other agencies, both statutory and voluntary.

Since its opening in 1988, Acorns' reputation has been built on quality of care, and attention to detail – where the whole family is supported, reflecting the Palliative Care Network's vision towards 'Living well to the end of life.'

Acorns has developed in size and expertise, and led nationally and internationally toward the immensely important goal of giving life limited children and their families the best possible care.

Acorns' three hospices employ more than 170 care staff, including a large multi-disciplinary Community Team. Its work is also hugely supported by 350 committed and trained volunteers.

The Community Team is the first contact for Acorns families. Acorns contacts all newly accepted families within 7 days.

The hospices would welcome referrals, at Acorns in Birmingham (tel. 0121 248 4850); Acorns in The Black Country (Tel 01922 422500); and Acorns for the Three Counties (tel 01905 767676), for details see www.acorns.org.uk

There is no charge for Acorns' service but running costs stand at £4,500 per day per hospice that's £450 per bed.

To find out more about Acorns, please visit www.acorns.org.uk.