

Questions and Answers

The Partnership between Acorns Children's Hospice and Aston Villa Football Club

June 3 2008

Q What difference will this arrangement make, in helping support for hospice care to grow?

A: As a pioneer in children's hospice care, Acorns is delighted to be the partner in this generous decision, which today changes the face of children's care in the UK.

This unprecedented level of support will mark a sea change in recognition of hospice care for children. Children's Hospice care will be visible as never before: in government, in corporate business, to every man, woman and child in the street.

It is about like-mindedness and shared values and it brings the strength and power of the sporting community together with the most urgent needs of the wider community in a way not seen before.

Q. Why are you putting more pressure on the public for funding when you should be pressurising the Government to give you more money?

A. That's exactly the work we are doing. We're working with the Strategic Health Authority and trying to work in partnership with the Primary Care Trusts. These arenas have potential funding capabilities but we do not see that government funding will ever do more than scratch the surface of our costs – there simply isn't enough money in the NHS to cover all the nation's health needs.

This platform will help us massively with our awareness campaign and will help us to lobby Government and put more pressure on them, on behalf of all children's hospices so that at least children's hospices get their fair share.

We don't expect the public to give just to Acorns, we want them to recognise children's hospices everywhere and have a true understanding of the importance of our work.

Q. How much do people really trust charities these days? Recent reports suggest public perception of charitable organisations is changing, with evidence to say the public is becoming wary.

A. Acorns' care work is overseen by The Healthcare Commission. The Fundraising Standards Board, which offers people a tick 'mark of reassurance' to look for, when giving to charities scrutinises all our income generation activities and we are proud to have been selected as one of the earliest members of this organisation..

Acorns, along with hundreds of top charities, adheres to a strict set of codes laid down by the Charity Commission and also our own fundraising Charter commits us to treat people with respect, fairness, and honesty in money raising activities.

On the ground, Aston Villa has been working with Acorns for around 18 months, and has appreciated that we are a service-driven charity actively giving required specialist care and support to life-limited children and their families, and that demand for our services grows daily.

They have seen how we operate and understand our needs: they can see that we're trying to help ourselves by working in partnership with Primary Care Trusts.

They have seen our struggle to build the level of awareness required to help the 1,000 life-limited children and their families, and to raise the funds that we need. They are giving us a fantastic platform to help our messages to reach the widest audience.

We are sure that their confidence in us is because of both our care services and how we raise our funds and this has ultimately led to the deepening of our relationship with them.

Q Why aren't Villa and other supporters giving you more?

A. This partnership is giving us so much more than money - it is giving us an opportunity to raise awareness across the West Midlands community, to help us achieve sustainable funding for the years to come, so that we can be sure that when a family comes to us in the future looking for help we can be sure that we can offer them support for as long as they may need it – both of us safe in the knowledge that there is no need to worry about how we will fund it.

It is refreshing to see such support, and deeply encouraging to Acorns families and all of those people, many of them volunteers, who have worked so hard to give them the care and help they deserve.

It will simply help life-limited children at Acorns to get the most from every day.

Support like this will help the children's hospice care movement to place care on a more sure footing; and for more children, than ever before.

It's much more important that Villa do what they're doing for us here. Acorns is at the heart of The West Midlands community and they have supported us enormously well over the last 20 years. What we need now from the Villa and what they've so generously given us is this huge platform to get our message across to all of the other people in the West Midlands who don't know what we do. And we know from past experience that by giving them that message they will come and support us. They've done it over the years and we're sure they'll do it in the future. The key to this is getting the message out to far more people and that's what's so exciting about this whole relationship.

Q How does Acorns work with consultants and doctors?

A. Our children are in the care of their consultants and GPs and we work alongside them to administer the medical requirements of our children. We also provide events and seminars for professionals to further increase awareness of the work we do.

Q. What support is there for families with a life limited child who cannot cope with the daily pressure put upon them?

A Acorns is unique in that we provide 24/7 care for our families when they turn to us. We are the only organisation in the area that provides this emergency care.

Q How much of the money raised goes directly into care?

A For every £1 we spend on fundraising, £5 more goes directly to our care provision.

Q. Will other charities now lose out as they perceive Acorns to have such a strong platform for its message?

A. All charities can only benefit from this extra awareness, as it raises the national issue that there is a massive lack of funding and awareness for charities such as Acorns who provide vital services. This partnership is groundbreaking in the charity field as it will instantly bring awareness of our issues and challenges to light.

As a parent, it is harrowing news to be told your child will likely die before you. An estimated 20,000 families across the UK face this reality. Some children will die very young; others a number of years after diagnosis. In most cases, full-time care falls to the parents – 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The whole family faces emotional and financial strain.

Children's hospice services help children and families to face these challenges, and to make the most of life. They welcome the whole family for a break in a home-from-home environment or in the comfort of their own home. They also offer symptom control, end-of-life care, therapies (such as play, art and music therapy) and bereavement support for all family members.

There are 41 children's hospices across the UK. Each service is an independent charity relying on public support to continue caring – the increased national awareness that will come from this partnership will help every one of them.

Q. How did this Partnership happen? Who approached whom first?

A. We've enjoyed a warm relationship with Aston Villa over a number of years. But this particular relationship has developed in an organic way and has transformed from a little acorn into a big oak tree.

Aston Villa has already paid for 230 days of care at our Selly Oak hospice in Birmingham and players such as Gareth Barry have visited the children often. Villa has had the chance to learn more about the work we do; and to understand our greater need to reach more children, and fundraise to keep our service going.

They came up with the partnership idea in response to listening to our need and understanding our difficulties.

Q Will players be making frequent visits to the hospices and to Acorns' events?

A Yes, AVFC has allocated us a generous amount of player time for the coming year. Villa has developed a really good understanding of what we do and we know the players look forward to following the progress of the children they meet.

We've had a growing and increasingly warm relationship with them, and we are sure this will continue long into the future.

Q Will you be getting lots of free tickets for the families and staff?

A. Aston Villa has already been very generous to our families by allowing them the opportunity to come to every home game throughout last season – we know that this will continue.

Q Will you get an Acorns box?

A. Yes. We will have access to an executive box at the stadium for families at every home game and to entertain potential corporate partners.

Q Will the Acorns' logo replace the 32Red logo on the banners around the ground?

A Yes

Q What percentage of revenue does Acorns get from the shirt sales?

A It is too early to say. We do not yet have that level of detail.

Q How are you going to raise additional funds from this opportunity?

A We will be introducing a series of fundraising initiatives throughout the year, which will raise both awareness and money.

We will target ourselves to leverage £2 million worth of income from this opportunity.

Q How will Acorns manage the possible effects of this relationship on stakeholders? Do you have an external (PR) Agency helping you?

A We have a stakeholder management plan to maintain our close ties with our existing supporters be they individuals, support groups or corporate relationships who remain vitally important to us. We need to grow our numbers of supporters to enable us to reach these additional 1000 children. This development with Aston Villa is not about substituting our existing supporter base; rather this platform will enable us to reach out to more in the community to support Acorns.

This is about growth, and we need supporters help to turn this new increase in awareness into an increase in income. We manage all of our media and communications in-house, with a specialist team who intrinsically know and understand our messages, and understand how important it is to get them right, while protecting the children.

From working closely with Aston Villa, and through building this relationship, that team has a clear and close understanding of Villa's position.

Q Will this mean more jobs, for nurses?

A We have gone ahead with our strategy of finding other children, knowing that it will increase our need for resources.

We are exploring the feasibility of extending ways of reaching out to these families, both at our hospices and at home.

We are going to look at many more ways of how we can look after these children, which will require more resources.

We can only make this work if the community helps us. What has been achieved so far is thanks to the relentless work of our supporters and community support groups.

Q. How do families who think they qualify for Acorns get in touch with you or get referred?

A They are referred via their GPs, but can contact any of our three hospices via details on our website, www.acorns.org.uk or by calling **0845 128 4444**

Q. These figures of 1,000 more children needing your help – where are they from?

A. The research was carried out by the Association of Children's Palliative Care (ACT). Three quarters of a million children living in the UK are registered disabled. Of these, 20,000 are known to have life-limiting conditions, and we now know that 1,680 of these children live in the West Midlands. As we currently care for 600 children and their families, there are a further thousand or more children we urgently need to reach.