



RiverSideBySide Annual Report 2022





Introduction

RiverSideBySide is Middlesbrough FC's pledge to champion equality, diversity, and inclusion.

The banner campaign was first formally launched in 2017, and we are proud of the progress which continues to be made within the club, at the Riverside Stadium and across the Teesside region.

Working closely with MFC Foundation - our official and independent charity - equality, diversity and inclusion is considered in all aspects of our operations as a football club, including providing regular training and development opportunities for staff, offering help and guidance for match-going fans, delivering workshops and activities at the Riverside and various community venues, and engaging with a range of supporter groups to ensure fair representation.

We continue to work towards the Intermediate level of the Premier League's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Standard (PLEDIS). Though not mandatory, we believe that PLEDIS helps guide us towards our targets around equality, diversity and inclusion.

This document provides a review of RiversideBySide over the past year, including a selection of its success stories.

Helena Bowman

Head of Business Operations and Community
Middlesbrough Football Club

Statement Of Commitment

Middlesbrough Football Club is committed to promoting equality by treating people fairly and with respect; by recognising inequalities exist; by taking steps to address them; and by providing access and opportunities for all members of the community.

Middlesbrough Football Club's commitment is to eliminate discrimination on the basis of age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy & maternity, race, religion & belief or sexual orientation.

We will ensure that we treat people fairly and with respect and that we will provide access and opportunities for all members of the community to take part in and enjoy our activities.

The content of this statement applies equally to the treatment of our staff, customers, supporters, clients, partners and suppliers and is fully supported by the Executive Management Committee of MFC.

EDI Objectives

Our commitment includes are strategic EDI priorities as follows:

- Leverage the position of the club in the Teesside community to promote greater levels of tolerance and inclusion in local society and amongst supporters
- Embed a culture of EDI throughout the club at all levels, ensuring that MFC players, coaches, employees and Foundation staff are confident as ambassadors for the club's values and commitment
- Continually improve the diversity profile of club employees and supporter base in alignment with that in the Teesside area
- Improve confidence in reporting of incidents ensuring all players, employees and supporters are aware of reporting mechanisms
- Ensure the Riverside Stadium is accessible to all

Reporting Discrimination

The club encourages supporters to report any discrimination they witness or suffer at a professional match, non-league game, grassroots level or online.

Matchday

- Text the MFC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion text line on 07340 718965, giving full details of the incident and which stand, row and seat it took place if possible. The text will be sent to the matchday safety team who will investigate via steward intervention as well as direct or remote observation.
- Speak to a club steward or other member of staff.
- Use The free Kick It Out App, or the Kick It Out reporting feature available within the menu of our own Middlesbrough FC Official app.

Social Media

We also encourage supporters to report any incidents witnessed on social media platforms that directly affect Middlesbrough Football Club, staff, players or supporters, by email to supporters@mfc.co.uk, sharing details of the incident and screenshots of any offensive social media posts where possible.

Our advice to fans who see or receive hurtful, abusive or discriminatory comments is not to engage directly with those accounts/perpetrators but instead to first report the post to the relevant social media platform and then to block the user from any further contact.

Other Ways To Report

Email: supporters@mfc.co.uk

Telephone: 01642 757640

Contact Kick It Out (Tel: 0800 169 9414) or the Football Association (Tel: 0800 085 0508)

EDI Steering Group

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion steering group meet regularly to discuss and implement improvements across the club. The below staff, representing a range of departments, make up the group, while contributions are also made from external advisors.

Helena Bowman - Head of Business Operations and Community (EDI Senior Lead)

Kathryn Hancock - Head of HR (EDI Lead)

Brian Robinson - Head of Safeguarding (Equality Lead)

Matt Barber - Deputy Head of Media

Laura Crook - Concourse Supervisor

Barry Dawson - Head of Academy Education

Yvonne Ferguson - Head of Supporter Services

Lee Fryett - Chief Commercial Officer

Toseef Khan - Education Officer, MFC Foundation

Ryan Millington - Matchday Hospitality Services Manager

Laura Nugent - Senior Football Administration

Caroline Reeves-Hoyle - Catering Operations Manager

Shane Sellers - Deputy Safety Officer

RiverSideBySide Matchdays

As well as through refreshed branding, our RiverSideBySide initiative was given renewed exposure through four specific home matchdays over the course of the 2021/22 season, each with focus on a 'protected characteristic' as described in the Equality Act 2010.

The aim was to highlight the work being done by the club towards equality, diversity and inclusion, under the RiverSideBySide banner.

The matches were as follows:

v Barnsley, 20 October: Race

v Swansea City, 4 December: LGBTQ+

v Luton Town, 5 March: Sex

v Hull City, 9 April: Disability



Each RiverSideBySide matchday saw key messaging shared via the club's official website, social media channels and printed programme, while first team players were incorporated into activity in the lead-up to the fixture, for instance Duncan Watmore was part of an educational Q&A session on LGBTQ+ awareness involving local schools.

Staff And Supporter Survey

Since 2017, the club has conducted annual surveys of staff, supporters, job applicants and MFC Foundation participants relating to equality, diversity and inclusion. The anonymised data plays an important role in shaping the club's policies and initiatives.

Since surveys started in 2017, there has been a significant shift in the diversity of the workforce, specifically in the areas of Race, Disability and LGB. This shift continues within the supporter base, with more Disabled and LGB supporters than ever before. In addition, 20% of Season Card holders are female, among the highest in the EFL.

12.4% of staff have a disability

9.1% of staff are from an ethnically diverse community

37.7% of staff are female

The most common disabilities among supporters are physical impairment ambulant (45%) hearing impairment (31%) and mental health condition (20%)

The age range with the highest percentage of supporters is 55-64 years

3.7% of supporters are LGB, the highest percentage since 2017

27.5% OF JOB APPLICANTS ARE FROM AN ETHNICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUND

80.3% of supporters believe the club is committed to promoting EDI and treating people fairly

14.1% of supporters are disabled, an increase of 6.8% since 2017

98.5% of supporters are white

75.1% of MFC Foundation participants are male

Did you know?

- The club has a multi-faith prayer room, in the East Stand, for use on matchdays and non-matchdays.
- The club has a changing places toilet for individuals with additional needs. It is located on the lower concourse of the West Stand.
- MFC Foundation have a Race Ambassador and an LGBT Ambassador.
- MFC has an inclusive communications policy, to ensure all internal and external communications consider equality, diversity and inclusion.

Learning and Development

We offer regular learning and development opportunities for our staff, both to enhance their own professional and personal progression, and also to improve the experience for supporters and members of the community whom they encounter in the workplace.

Autism Awareness

Two staff training sessions were held following the relaunch of 'Quiet Hour' for visitors to our retail store with autism and similar conditions and an increase in job applications from individuals with autism.

LGBTQ+ Awareness

An all-staff online programme was launched after annual survey data and through feedback forms suggested that knowledge and confidence around the protected characteristic of sexual orientation was lower than in other areas.

Dementia Awareness

More than 60 staff took part in three separate training sessions, many citing that their confidence levels in supporting people living with dementia on a matchday and non-matchday had increased.

Ramadan Awareness

24 staff at the Foundation took part in a training session delivered by Race Ambassador and EDI steering group member Toseef Khan. The session educated staff on the importance of Ramadan in the Muslim faith and will be rolled out club-wide.

Disability Awareness

Another area in which our staff survey demonstrated a desire to gain more knowledge, this training was delivered by an external consultant who attends the EDI steering group. The training increased understanding of supporters with accessibility needs.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

10 Academy staff took part in a Youth Mental Health First Aid course which provided an understanding of common mental health issues and the skills needed to guide young people to further support.



Supporter Groups

We work closely with a number of supporter groups which offer a valuable variety of perspectives on key issues. Many of these groups provide representation at the wider Middlesbrough Supporters Forum, which was independently founded in February 2017 with the aim of strengthening links between club and fans.



Boro Fusion

Set up in July 2017 as a voice for Boro's ethnically diverse communities



Rainbow Reds

Founded in 2019 to promote LGBTQ+ inclusivity across the MFC family



Middlesbrough Disabled Supporters Association

Formed in 1990 for the benefit of all the club's disabled supporters



Twe12th Man

Loyal and passionate fan group based in the North Stand at the Riverside



Red Faction

Inspired by Ultras culture, bringing colour, noise and a defined identity to the terraces



Middlesbrough Supporter South

Originally created by London-based fans, now representing Boro exiles across the world



Fly Me To The Moon

Representatives of long-running fanzine and online messageboard FMTTM



Boro Supporters Club 2020

Friendly community of fans with a social emphasis

CASE STUDY #1 - Matchday Sensory Room

Our Matchday Sensory Room was first opened in March 2017 and was developed in partnership with the Premier League, BT Sport, The Shippey Campaign and Teesside University.

The room - featuring special lighting, seating and activities - is a calm environment enabling people on the autism spectrum, and their families, to enjoy matchdays.

Catherine Burrell, mum to Tom and Harry said: "Being able to arrive at the ground early to beat the masses was perfect to alleviate any initial anxieties and provide a chance to familiarise children to the environment. It is easy to forget how manic and overwhelming match days can sometimes become. Crowds of people that you often, literally, get swept away with. Lost amidst the fast pace walking to the ground. Then there is all the different sounds and smells to take in – complete sensory overload!

"The staff were available throughout the match supporting us all to ensure we got to our seats and help us access the Sensory Room at any point required throughout the afternoon, when both children and parents needed to recharge their batteries before heading back out to cheer on the Boro.

"I know that our boys had fun. A sincere thank you to the team at the Riverside who worked extremely hard with all the families, making everyone feel at ease, you most definitely received a 5* rating from our family from start to finish!"

Our Sensory Room continues to undergo developments and improvements. For more information and bookings, please **email supporters@mfc.co.uk**



CASE STUDY #2 - Academy Trailblazers

In 2021, our first year Academy scholars completed a 'Trailblazers' project, celebrating the rich diversity of players in British football and showcasing the achievements of the first ethnic minority footballers to represent MFC.

The Under-16 youngsters researched two historic pioneers of the game; Jamaican-born Lindy Delapenha, the first black player to pull on a Boro shirt who went on to make over 250 appearances for the club, and Arthur Wharton, widely considered to be the first black professional footballer in the world. The group visited a mural of Wharton where he started his amateur career in nearby Darlington, as well as the Arthur Wharton Foundation, the charity organisation set up in his honour.

The scholars also spoke with four modern trailblazers, holding Q&A sessions with Seb Hines, Marcus Tavernier and Nathan Wood - the first three black players to come through the Academy and make professional debuts for the club - as well as Marrie Wiecezorek, who represented Middlesbrough Women and England as a player and now works with MFC Foundation.

They then held a competition to design a mural of their own, depicting trailblazers Seb, Marcus and Nathan, which was brought to life as a contemporary piece of wall art on the walls of the Riverside by Dan Walls from Illumination Wall Art - leaving a lasting legacy for the project and a piece of inspiration for future generations.

One of the youngsters involved, Max Howells, said: "We learnt a lot about respecting different backgrounds, respecting where people have come from and the challenges they come across.

"It was good to speak to players like Seb, Tav and Nathan who are role models for us on and off the pitch.

"There was a lot of work that went into the project, we worked well as a team on it, and I think we all understand more because of it."



CASE STUDY #3 - Sign Language Messaging

First team player Matt Crooks recorded a series of sign language messages which are used on our official social media channels as well as on the Big Screen at the Riverside Stadium on matchdays.

Matt, who has several family members that communicate using sign language, recorded messages such as 'Welcome to the Riverside' and 'Enjoy The Game.'

The initiative is carried in partnership with MFC Foundation, with the aim of making the Riverside a more welcoming place on matchdays for signers, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing.



CASE STUDY #4 - Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme

Living with a hidden disability can make daily life more demanding for many people, but it can also be difficult for others to identify, acknowledge or understand those challenges.



Wearing the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower is a way of discreetly indicating that an individual may need additional support, or a little more time.

The club and MFC Foundation offer a number of products which display the yellow sunflower on a green background, including lanyards, wristbands, pin badges and more, available free of charge to supporters, staff and Foundation participants with hidden disabilities.

For more information, please email supporters@mfc.co.uk

CASE STUDY #5 - Dementia Dances

Over the last year, the club and MFC Foundation have come together with Dementia Friendly Middlesbrough to host regular tea dances at the Riverside and other community venues.

The events are always full of dancing, fun and laughter, bringing smiles to the faces of elderly members of our community.

Research suggest that there are as many as 1.4m chronically lonely and social isolated elderly people in the UK, and events such as these can often be a vital lifeline, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.



CASE STUDY #6 - Helping Supporters Make Riverside Return

After more than a year away from the Riverside due to COVID-19 restrictions, many supporters were understandably cautious and concerned about returning to watch their team as part of a matchgoing crowd in 2021.

In order to alleviate such concerns, the club hosted a number of drop-in sessions at the stadium, allowing chance for fans to speak to a friendly face and answer any queries they had about being back at the match - while a 'Here To Help Hub' was also set up for supporters to visit in the Riverside's FanZone area come matchday.

This support was furthered following the temporary introduction of vaccine or lateral flow certification in late 2021, with several more help sessions held to assist those who may otherwise have struggled to meet the requirements, particularly the set-up of digital COVID Passes on mobile phones.

CASE STUDY #7 - Tackling Racism Workshops

MFC Foundation deliver Tackling Racism workshops in primary and secondary schools across the area, with the aim of making students feel more comfortable speaking openly about racism and what can be done to help eradicate it.

The in-depth primary school programme is classroom based and discussion heavy, segmented into six weeks with educational games and activities throughout.

1. Introduction to Racial Equality
2. Stereotypes & Black Sporting History
3. Role models
4. Allyship
5. What's being done regarding tackling racism?
6. How can we make a change?

Feedback from teaching staff has been excellent:

N Sturdy – St Benedict's: 'Thanks again for last week, the children loved it!'

S Kaur – St Benedict's: 'Thank you for the brilliant session with Y5. They really enjoyed it and got a lot out of it.'

C Rumins – St Benedict's: 'They really enjoyed the session so thanks again!'

E McQuillan – The Village Primary: 'The children absolutely loved it and got so much from the session and you were brilliant with them!'

J Bournier – St Bernadette's: 'Thanks for the session yesterday, the children got a lot from it.'



CASE STUDY #8 - Football Welcomes

A three-year pilot project funded through Amnesty International, Football Welcomes is delivered by MFC Foundation with the aim of creating more welcoming communities for refugees and those seeking asylum in the local area.

The initiative offers football and educational provision for those who have sought asylum in Middlesbrough as a result of fleeing war, conflict and the risk of persecution in their home countries.

The participants are from all over the world: Iran, Eritrea, Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine and more, and have chance to develop skills, and enjoy the sense of belonging which team membership gives.



CASE STUDY #9 - Rainbow Reds

We are proud to celebrate and support our community of LGBTQ+ fans.

We work closely with organisations such as Stonewall, who lead on the nationwide Rainbow Laces campaign, as well as Boro fan group Rainbow Reds, who are represented on the Middlesbrough Supporters Forum.

Co-chair of Rainbow Reds, Matthew Gale, gave a powerful interview with Sky Sports on his own experiences and hopes for the future.



“Football is one of the biggest things in my life, and it’s one of the biggest communities in the world. The main word for me is inclusivity. We have to make sure everyone feels safe, welcome, and able to enjoy a match. There’s nothing worse in being in a stadium of 30,000 fans and feeling you don’t belong.”

First team player Duncan Watmore, speaking to students from a local school as part of an educational Q&A, had this to say.

“I think any stigma comes down to lack of education and lack of awareness, and that’s what has to happen. With education and awareness comes compassion. Be simple and be kind, it’s a simple message but an effective one - it needs to happen to remove that stigma.”

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