

Supporters Summit 2014

Supporters Trusts.

I attended the Supporter's Trusts session in the latter part of the Supporter's Summit. This was a super opportunity to hear about the experiences, the trials and the tribulations of other trusts, as well as give The Blues Trust some food for thought.

The first to speak was Barney from Charlton Athletic Supporters Trust. Barney talked about how after the Club left The Valley, the fans got together with the owners. There appears to be a perception that Charlton found forming their Trust easy – Barney said that there were several attempts at forming a Trust, and so this “ease” is a misconception. The Trust was launched on the 5th December 2012, the 20th Anniversary of the return to the Valley. The Trust has been running for two years and has 1000 members, thanks to the discussion that they have had with supporters. Campaigns and surveys, as well as meet and greet sessions have seen their membership improve. Recently their survey on Safe Standing has shown that 75% of members are in favour of it. Barney's advice was to get out there, meet your fanbase, set up stalls and make sure you have a match day presence.

It was the turn of Dave from Cambridge Fans United next. This Trust cites asking questions and communicating with the club being a key recipe for Trust success. Cambridge had been in administration and their ground was sold. The Trust have been asked to buy the club but the finances aren't there to make this possible. Although the Trust is still treated with suspicion, their strength lies in the fact that they are supported by the fans and the local community. Dave's advice to trusts was ensure that they engage with the local community. Their next issue is to increase their membership. Currently 3000 attend Cambridge United games, and the Trust membership is 10% of that, with the membership fee being £20 annually.

Katrina Law from THST (Tottenham Hotspurs Supporters Trust) then took the floor. They are a successful Trust that are not going down the club ownership road. The Trust was established in 2003 with the current Trust board taking over in 2013. Katrina explained about how they had inherited a badly managed and neglected trust. Their first steps were to get a website built. Next they looked at membership, and were shocked to discover that they had not accepted a new member since 2009. In order to engage with potential new members, they launched social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook. The membership data was then cleansed, a Survey Monkey account was set up for Polls, and after re-joining SD, the Trust was relaunched.

Their successes have been becoming affiliate members for the FSF, the opportunity to unite with other trusts, in coalition campaigns, and the build up of contacts in local and national press. Although the Trust was revived and relaunched, it needed to reconnect. This was done through engaging on the issues that are relevant to the Spurs fan base. THST make it clear that there are secret off record notes, they provide legal support for fans, and also ran a sustained campaign against “stub hub”. The Trust then responded with the solution of an ethical ticket campaign. Safe Standing was polled, and the result was that the Trust engaged with the club and it was then agreed that if it became legislation they would build a safe

standing stand. Other campaigns that the Trust has shown their support for are “Twenty’s Plenty” and “Football without Fans is Nothing.” Katrina talked about the fact that ticketing is a big issue, and the trust pushed for a freeze on season ticket and other prices. There are good relationships with safety, press, communications officers, but the relationship with the Club’s Board can be improved. Again, there was emphasis on helping the community, and Katrina explained how the Trust has helped others with ACV app. Their membership is 2000, and 18,000 followers on Twitter. Fundraising ventures have proved popular, with a walk up Mount Snowdon and auctioning a shirt being two ways this was done.

It was the turn of Brakes Trust, who are the Trust of Leamington FC. There was a real emphasis on strengthening community links, and a successful strategy that has been implemented is a Citizen of the Year Award. This can be for anybody who is nominated and voted as being worthy of the title. This meant that the Trust were then brought into the Community. A successful Save Our Shirt campaign was reinforced by 20,000 beer mats being printed off and given out. After a minibus was donated to the Trust, this was used to great advantage, and is used to collect supporters that cannot always get to the game, as well as it transporting fans away. Again, to strengthen community links, it is available to hire as it is licensed for community use. Games for the community are organised on the pitch, and the ground is listed as an Asset of Community Value. Despite this, there is potential risk of the ground being occupied by travellers, and the Trust is currently working on ways to ensure that this does not happen. The club is run by volunteers, and is a not for profit organisation.

The session ended with a Q and A, but I felt that any potential questions that I had were already answered. I wanted to know about how our Trust can reach out and get people involved. This was what was asked at the end. The answer was crystal clear – give people a reason to get involved. Show your fanbase what you can do. It is important to keep going and persevere. The quickest way to disengage with supporters and members is to be inefficient. Engage with the youth supporters and channel their energy.

This was an inspiring and reassuring session, which left me with perhaps a bit of a clichéd thought but a valid one. It’s not what our supporters can do for us, but what we can do for our supporters. I think Blues Trust will get there with that one, and I remain optimistic that the board of BCFC will too one day.....

Emma-Louise Hodgson

Blues Trust Co-opted Board Member