



Freedom from Torture



# TACKLING TRAUMA

Evaluating the impact of the Arsenal and Freedom from Torture football therapy group

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**Dr. Rebecca Horn**  
Independent Psychosocial Specialist





## Foreword

We are hugely proud of our partnership with Arsenal in the Community. At Freedom from Torture, we work with survivors of torture from countries across the globe to help them find their voices and rebuild their lives in the safety of the UK.

Having gone through one of the worst human experiences imaginable, they find themselves here alone and isolated, knowing little about our culture and with a long road to recovery ahead of them.

Football has many powers, among them the ability to break down barriers and bring people together from all backgrounds, languages, cultures and experiences. As such, it can be a huge source of comfort for someone far from home. Community building and group work is increasingly recognised as key to rehabilitation of survivors of torture. So the opportunity to take part in a football group, focused on therapeutic benefits but bringing survivors together through a familiar sport and under the auspices of Arsenal, a club well known and recognised worldwide, has been invaluable to those who have taken part.

As this report shows, the group is a product of a valued partnership with our Islington neighbours and a coming together of shared values. We are proud that the crucial role of the staff has been recognised, and especially proud of the players who continue to engage in the group, support each other, play the 'Arsenal way' and demonstrate such enormous capacity to overcome and transform adversity.



**Sonya Sceats**

Chief Executive, Freedom from Torture



## Foreword

Arsenal Football Club and Freedom from Torture hold deeply aligned values and a profound belief that a sense of belonging to a community is a vital starting point for a process through which people who have faced unimaginable challenges can begin to recover a sense of self and start believing in a positive future.

We are passionate about using sport and especially football coaching to create that sense of community and belonging. This provides a foundation for participants to start a healing journey which can lead to rediscovering confidence in their bodies, connectedness with themselves and others, a valued place in the world and a renewed sense of enjoyment and fun.

This report evidences that our joint Football Group project opened the door to a deep level of transformation in the lives of the participants and we are humbled and proud in equal measure to present this evidence. I would like to emphasise however that the courage of stepping through the door and travelling down a positive, transformative path is all down to the individuals who participated in our Football Group and who became, and remain, a bright light of inspiration in all our lives.

Our relationship with Freedom from Torture has been inspirational. Together we have developed a pioneering and effective partnership that has consistently held the wellbeing of our participants as a primary focus. It has also provided evidence and inspiration to increase Arsenal's ambitions to develop equally impactful projects across the globe.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the success of this Football Group project for their profound belief and commitment that it would transform lives and I would like to thank the participants for their immense courage and trust in us.

**Svenja Geissmar**

Chair, The Arsenal Foundation



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## Executive Summary

Arsenal in the Community (AitC) and Freedom from Torture (FFT) have together been running a football group for FFT clients since 2012. FFT is a UK charity which provides medical consultation, forensic documentation of torture, psychological therapies and support, as well as practical assistance, to survivors of torture and organised violence. AitC is a part of Arsenal Football Club, which delivers programmes across four main themes (sport, social inclusion, education and health), always prioritising social outcomes ahead of sporting achievements and working towards its mission: 'A Sense of Belonging'.

The aims of this evaluation are:

- To increase understanding of the Football Group approach
- To understand how much and in what ways the Football Group assists in recovery
- To identify future developments for the Football Group and the partnership between AitC and FFT

The evaluation was conducted between June 2017 and January 2018. It involved the following activities:

- Individual and group discussions with FFT and AitC staff involved with the project
- Observations of five football group sessions
- Participant Ranking Exercises conducted with two groups of players
- Individual interviews with four players (two current members of the group and two former members)
- Interview with General Counsel of Arsenal Football Club
- Questionnaire completed by 25 players
- Five football sessions rated using a checklist by an AitC Coach

- The behaviour during football sessions of 26 players was rated by the FFT clinician attached to the football group
- FFT psychosocial wellbeing assessment data analysed for 60 clients who were referred to the football group
- FFT physical health assessment data analysed for 30 players who were referred to the group
- Physical health interviews conducted with five FFT clients currently involved with the group

### Description of the Football Group

Freedom from Torture works with survivors of torture from across the world, most of whom are seeking asylum and refuge in the UK. The client group includes both men and women, and is very diverse in terms of age, nationality, educational level and torture experiences. In many cases, clients are suffering not only from the physical and emotional consequences of torture, but also the emotional, social and practical consequences of leaving their homes, families and livelihoods, in addition to dealing with the asylum system in the UK with minimal social or economic resources to draw on. Torture targets the whole person, so all aspects of life are affected - including physical, social, emotional and economic dimensions.

The partnership between FFT and AitC began informally in 2010, with English classes being established by AitC for FFT clients in 2011 and the football group in 2012. Currently, between 15 and 25 FFT clients<sup>1</sup> participate in the football sessions held every Monday at AitC's 'Hub'. Clients are referred by their clinician at FFT; the only criteria is that they have an interest in joining and it is medically safe for them to do so. The members of the football group are very diverse in terms of age, physical fitness and football skills. On average, players are older than those in other AitC groups. The group is theoretically open to both men and women, but in practice women do not join.

The group is seen by the staff as a therapeutic activity, with an emphasis on psychosocial wellbeing rather than on physical fitness or football skills. Therefore, the sessions focus on providing a safe environment in which players can enjoy the activities and strengthen their overall wellbeing (e.g. physical, social, emotional). Each session consists of warm-up activities, which have a focus on teamwork and communication, followed by short games, and ending with a cool-down. An important element of the football group is that each session is delivered jointly by staff from FFT and AITC, bringing together the expertise of each partner. The players, however, see the sessions as an enjoyable opportunity to play football; the therapeutic elements are integrated into the sessions in a way which makes them 'invisible' to an observer who is not already aware of this aspect of the group.

Until clients obtain their 'right to remain' or refugee status, their involvement with the FFT/ Arsenal football group is limited to attending the football session. However, once a client obtains their 'right to remain', AitC staff start looking for opportunities to link the client to other aspects of their programme, in particular the Employability project.

The partnership between FFT and Arsenal is unusual in that FFT do not just refer clients to the football group and leave AitC to provide the service, but staff from both organisations continue to work together to support the players and each other. Although the partnership has evolved organically as the football group has developed, there was a deliberate intention from the outset to combine the FFT psychotherapy and the AITC social models to create a strong psychosocial framework for the football project.

### Understanding of the Football Group approach

A Programme Model was developed, which identified the key outcomes of the football group and the factors which contributed to these outcomes being achieved. Players will, of course,

benefit in different ways from their involvement with the football group, but there are certain benefits (outcomes) which were identified consistently by players and staff.

These include outcomes related to social connectedness, and feeling part of a group which understands, accepts and values them (developing friendships and sense of family; feeling of belonging; feeling valued and special). It also includes outcomes related to individual psychology and emotions, feeling more positive (enjoyment and pleasure; increased confidence) and being able to manage emotions, especially feelings of anger. Involvement with the football group facilitates access to other opportunities, so that players are able to develop a sense of hope for the future, and to work towards building a new life. Just as importantly, they are able to improve their physical health and develop a more positive relationship with their bodies.

The nature and structure of the football sessions themselves makes a considerable contribution to the achievement of these outcomes. The group is primarily therapeutic, rather than focusing on football skills or physical fitness. As a result, the sessions are run in a way that ensures they are a safe space in which all players can relax, enjoy the sessions, and begin to find ways to connect with others and manage their emotions. The fact that other group members are all FFT clients, who have had similar experiences, is an important part of establishing and maintaining a safe space.

Characteristics and perceptions of the two organisations involved in running the football group are also important factors in achieving the desired outcomes. The partnership between FFT and AitC contributes to the sense of safety, since FFT is a consistent presence as the players begin to take risks in terms of connecting with others, and participating in other AitC activities. The feeling of being accepted and valued by Arsenal, as a well-known and respected institution, plays an essential role in players beginning to develop feelings of confidence and self-worth.



The football group activities take place next to Emirates Stadium, in the heart of an Arsenal facility, creating a sense of connectedness with the club. The way that coaching staff welcome players, and demonstrate that they care about them, is very important in strengthening that sense of connectedness. Both AitC and FFT staff play a crucial role in modelling positive behaviour, particularly management of emotions and good relationships. The safe space created by all staff associated with the football group is strengthened by high levels of consistency in terms of approach, session content, staff attached to the group and low turnover of players.

Of particular note is the way in which the staff have been able to create an enjoyable environment for a group of players with considerable diversity in terms of physical fitness and football skills. Players were asked to rate how good they thought their football skills are and how physically fit they felt they were, and their responses indicate a wide range of self-perceived skill levels and fitness levels within the group. Yet almost all said they enjoyed the football sessions 'very much', which suggests that the coaches are able to manage the sessions so that all can participate fully, regardless of skill or fitness level. This is a considerable achievement on the part of the coaching team.

A final element of the programme which contributes to positive outcomes, is that players involved with the football group are linked to other projects run by AitC, which enables them to develop new skills and confidence, and hope for the future.

### **How much and in what ways the Football Group assists in recovery**

There is a general consensus that recovery from ongoing and complex distress involves three overlapping phases (sometimes described as stabilisation; trauma processing; reconnection). The AitC and FFT football group offers opportunities for its members to work

towards recovery through some key elements of reconnection (Lamb, 2017), including:

- reclaiming a physical self
- developing new interests
- reducing social isolation and connecting with a new community
- connecting with a transformed sense of self.

This evaluation aimed to explore the extent to which these possibilities for reconnection are built into the systems and structures of the football group, and the extent to which they have been achieved.

### *Reclaiming a physical self*

Although improved physical wellbeing was not spontaneously referred to as one of the benefits of the football group by the players, more detailed investigation of this issue revealed that most players experienced some physical health problems when they were referred to the football group, and these improved over the period they were involved in the group. In addition to this improvement in physical health, players also described developing confidence in their bodies, and a positive perception of what their bodies were capable of. Some said that through the football group they had been able to develop a more positive connection with their bodies even outside the group, and made efforts to stay fit and to eat healthily. There is evidence, therefore, that participation in the football group contributes towards reclaiming a physical self – an important element of the recovery process.

### *Developing new interests*

For many of the players, football was a part of their lives before displacement, so it was more a matter of reconnecting with a previous interest rather than developing a new one. However, one of the consequences of torture, and of displacement to a country which is often

experienced as hostile, is often a loss of interest in activities which were previously enjoyed. According to van der Kolk (2014), people who are traumatised are unable to experience pleasure in day-to-day activities, so just re-engaging with an activity and enjoying it is an achievement which can have a considerable impact on recovery.

A clear theme running through players' descriptions of their involvement with the football group, and of observations of the football group sessions, was the enjoyment they got from the activity. For many players the football sessions were the only time during the week when they would laugh and be released from the painful thoughts which consumed them for the rest of the time. Whilst engaging in an enjoyable activity for a few hours a week may seem like a small part of an overwhelmingly difficult existence, there is evidence that this can actually be an important element in the recovery of those involved in the football group (van der Kolk, 2014).

### *Reducing social isolation and connecting with a new community*

The centrality of social support and social connectedness in wellbeing and recovery from distressing experiences has been well-established through research in a wide variety of contexts (e.g. Kira, 2002; Hobfoll et al, 2007). There was a strong consensus amongst the players involved in this evaluation that finding a group of friends was one of the greatest benefits of their involvement in the football group. There is also evidence from staff ratings of players' behaviour that they are able to develop positive social relationships within the group, and that this is related to their participation in the football sessions but is not related to their football abilities.

There are characteristics of the football group which make it possible for almost all the FFT clients who engage with it to connect with others in non-threatening ways, and which enable them to build relationships over time. Once this has been achieved, it is possible for players to

start to connect with people outside the football group, sometimes through other AitC projects and sometimes externally (e.g. attending college; participation in a Sunday football league). This is an element of the football group which is likely to have a very significant impact on the recovery of those involved.

### *Connecting with a transformed sense of self.*

The ways in which players described their connection with AitC, and the opportunities associated with that, indicate that this relationship is important in players beginning to see themselves as something more than a survivor of torture. They start to see themselves as belonging to an organisation which is recognised and respected, and through the way they are accepted by Arsenal, and given opportunities to attend special events (e.g. matches), they begin to perceive themselves as valued. They also gain access to other AitC projects which help them to develop new skills and can potentially lead to opportunities for employment, and further integration into their new society.

Whilst players value their relationship with FFT, and greatly appreciate the support they continue to receive from the organisation, it is their new relationship with Arsenal which contributes to the development of a transformed sense of self. The partnership between the two organisations, therefore, plays a key role in the recovery process for those involved in the football group.

One of the great strengths of the FFT/ AITC partnership is that clients continue to work with FFT clinicians as they engage with the football group, so as they begin to reconnect with others and with their own bodies, they can continue to explore with their clinician issues which emerge through this process. The partnership is central to the success of the group – neither organisation would be in a position to facilitate this recovery process without the involvement of the other.



### Recommendations for future developments for the Football Group and the partnership between Arsenal in the Community and Freedom from Torture

There are many characteristics of the football group, and the partnership between AitC and FFT, which contribute to the recovery of players who engage with it. The first set of recommendations, therefore, relate to ensuring that certain elements of the programme are maintained.

It is recommended that AitC and FFT continue to:

- Use a joint working approach, with FFT clinicians supporting both players and the AitC staff.
- Maintain the therapeutic focus of the group, prioritising respect and participation and the establishment of a safe space in which players of all fitness levels and abilities can feel comfortable.
- Include non-threatening communication activities in warm-ups.
- Maintain the same coaching staff as are currently involved with the group. If it becomes necessary to involve new staff, ensure they have the key personal qualities (e.g. calm, compassionate, excellent interpersonal skills) as well as the technical skills and experience to work with this client group.
- Only invite FFT clients to join the group, since the fact that players have similar experiences is a crucial element in the success of the group.
- Maintain consistency within sessions. The fact that sessions follow broadly the same format each week means that players can predict what will happen, which creates a feeling of security.
- Continue to use the football group as a foundation so that players can move onto other things, both within AitC and outside.

There are also areas which could be developed further, and the second set of recommendations relate to issues which could be considered for the future.

- Provide additional support when FFT clients are first referred to the football group. It is helpful for an AitC coach to meet a client referred to the group before they attend. It could also be beneficial for the client to be accompanied from the FFT centre to the Hub for their first session, perhaps by a client who already attends the group.
- FFT to use the findings of this evaluation to raise awareness amongst FFT clinicians of the ways in which the football group assists in recovery.
- Establish a clear policy on the length of clients' involvement with the football group. Currently, they are able to participate in the football group for as long as they want to, and there are significant advantages to this. However, if more clients were referred to the group it would be difficult to maintain this practice informally, so it would be helpful to discuss and agree a policy on this now, rather than if/ when the group becomes too large to manage.
- Consider the feasibility of offering activities which female FFT clients would feel more comfortable joining.
- Develop and implement a simple monitoring and evaluation strategy, with clear expected outcomes and with baseline data collected when new players join the football group.
- Explore ways in which the football group may contribute to the 'safety/ stabilisation' and 'trauma processing' phases of recovery, as well as the 'reconnection' phase.

<sup>1</sup> FFT clients involved in the football group are referred to in this report as 'players'.





## A. Introduction

Arsenal in the Community (AitC) and Freedom from Torture (FFT) have together been running a football group for FFT clients since 2012. FFT is a UK charity which provides medical consultation, forensic documentation of torture, psychological therapies and support, as well as practical assistance, to survivors of torture and organised violence. AitC is a part of Arsenal Football Club, which delivers programmes across four main themes (sport, social inclusion, education and health), always prioritising social outcomes ahead of sporting achievements and working towards its mission: 'A Sense of Belonging'.

The partnership between FFT and AITC centres around both the football group for FFT clients, and an English as a Second Language (ESOL) group for FFT clients. Both are offered in AITC's 'Hub' and are facilitated by AITC staff, but they take place on separate days, and although there is some overlap in the clients attending the two sessions, the ESOL classes also attract FFT clients who do not attend the football sessions.

This evaluation focuses mainly on the football group, rather than the ESOL classes. The aims of the evaluation are:

- To increase understanding of the Football Group approach
- To understand how much and in what ways the Football Group assists in recovery
- To identify future developments for the Football Group and the partnership between AitC and FFT.





## B. The Client Group: Survivors of Torture

Freedom from Torture works with survivors of torture<sup>2</sup> from across the world, most of whom are seeking asylum and refuge in the UK. The client group includes both men and women, and is very diverse in terms of age, nationality, educational level and torture experiences. In many cases, clients are suffering not only from the physical and emotional consequences of torture, but also the emotional, social and practical consequences of leaving their homes, families and livelihoods, in addition to dealing with the asylum system in the UK with minimal social or economic resources to draw on.

### Consequences of torture

Torture targets the whole person, so all aspects of life are affected - including physical, social, emotional and economic dimensions. Survivors may have a wide range of psychological and social difficulties which do not easily fit within diagnostic categories (Williams & van der Merwe, 2013), and these are inter-linked with physical health issues and physical pain. Those who experience torture vary considerably in how they are affected in the long-term, but there are some common themes in the types of effects reported.

Although there are debates about the applicability of diagnostic categories, there is a general consensus that torture survivors report increased symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression and adjustment problems, including outbreaks of anger and violence directed towards family members (Williams & van der Merwe, 2013). The feeling of trust in the world which is essential to ordinary life is broken, making it extremely difficult for survivors to develop or maintain relationships with others (Boyles, 2017). Guilt and shame about humiliation during torture, and about the survivor's ability to withstand it, as well as guilt at surviving, are common (Williams & van der Merwe, 2013).

The physical consequences of torture are closely related to the psychological consequences, but are also influenced by the type of torture techniques used. Kira (2002) reports that torture survivors suffer from both symptoms with a physical cause and psychosomatic symptoms, including complaints relating to the nervous system, joints and lumbar disorders, disruption of breathing rhythm and hyperventilation. Aside from the damage to the body caused by torture, the biological systems which regulate breathing, heartbeat, digestion, hormone secretion and the immune system can become overwhelmed by real or perceived threats (van der Kolk, 2014: 94), leading to a wide range of physical health problems.

The physical and psychological effects of torture reinforce each other: 'When people are chronically angry or scared, constant muscle tension ultimately leads to spasms, back pain, migraine headaches, fibromyalgia and other forms of chronic pain' (van der Kolk, 2014: 266).

### Recovery

Recovery from traumatic experiences, including torture, involves finding ways to live a meaningful life, even if the distressing thoughts and feelings are still present to some extent (Lamb, 2017).

There is considerable support for a phased approach to working with survivors of torture and others who are in situations of ongoing and complex distress. Judith Herman, whose 1992 book 'Trauma and Recovery' has been very influential in work with torture survivors, names the stages of recovery 'safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection'. The three phases have also been described as (McFetridge et al, 2017: 6):

- Phase one: stabilisation (establishing safety, symptom management, improving emotion regulation and addressing current stressors).
- Phase two: trauma processing (focused processing of traumatic memories).

- Phase three: reconnection & reintegration (re-establishing social and cultural connection and addressing personal quality of life).

The three phases overlap, in that an individual might move between all three several times as they recover from distressing experiences. The therapist and client may need to move between the phases, retaining some elements of one phase and other elements of others, and holding these together at any given time. This understanding of the recovery process emphasises that it requires not only one-to-one therapeutic work, but also reconnection with the body and with other people (Herman, 1992; Papadopoulos, 2007; van der Kolk, 2014).

The football group for FFT clients relates particularly to the reconnection and reintegration phase. This phase is said to be 'key to the successful reclamation of a life and is thus central to any therapeutic endeavour. Phase three may be understood as the process of reengaging with others, and with oneself as an autonomous individual with rights and choices. It entails a willingness and capacity to relate compassionately to oneself and others, and (re) establish trust in self and others. This includes the freedom to choose to reengage in friendships and intimate relationships, and in occupational activities that promote health and wellbeing' (McFetridge et al, 2017: 40). The process of reconnection is described by Lamb (2017: 60) as including the following elements:

- Connecting with the therapist.
- Identifying pre-trauma personality, interests, strengths and resilience.
- Recognising significant role relationships.

- Facilitating post-traumatic growth through 'expert companionship'.
- Reclaiming a physical self.
- Creating opportunities for new interests to develop.
- Creating opportunities to reduce social isolation.
- Connecting with a transformed sense of self.
- Connecting with family, community and culture.

An important element of reconnection is the ability to establish new, positive relationships with other people: 'The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only in the context of relationship; it cannot occur in isolation' (Herman, 1992: 133).

In terms of the elements of reconnection outlined by Lamb (2017), the AitC and FFT football group offers opportunities to reclaim a physical self, develop new interests and reduce social isolation, connect with a transformed sense of self and connect with a new community. The establishment of new, positive relationships is a central aim of the football group. In the remainder of this report, we will explore the extent to which these possibilities for reconnection are built into the systems and structures of the football group, and the extent to which they have been achieved according to players and staff.

<sup>2</sup> Defined in Article 1 of the United Nations Convention Against Torture as 'Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtained from him, or a third person, information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity'.

## C. History of the FFT / Arsenal in the Community Football Group

In 2008 Freedom from Torture (or Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, as it was then) piloted a 12-week football group, which was unfunded (i.e. the training staff gave their time voluntarily). The group was found to be beneficial, and several attempts were made to obtain funding to continue but these were not successful and the group was not continued after the initial 12-week period. One of the outcomes of this initial pilot was the recognition of the crucial role played by the partnership between therapist and football coaches. Although the group came to an end, this learning was important when the football group was set up with AitC a few years later.

The initial connection in 2010 between FFT and AitC was made by the General Counsel for Arsenal, who is also responsible for the Arsenal Foundation (the grant-making arm of the club). She had been involved with FFT for ten years prior to connecting them with AitC, and saw the potential benefits of football for FFT clients. In the initial meeting between representatives of FFT and AitC those involved quickly recognised the synergies which existed around their aims, processes and approaches.

The partnership between FFT and AitC began relatively informally in December 2010 with the referral of a single FFT client to AitC. He was referred because he had a passion for football, so AitC mentored him and involved him in various activities over a 10-month period.

In October 2011 the formal partnership began with a 12-week English as a Second Language (ESOL) course initiated by AitC for a small group of FFT clients. The sessions took place on the Harvist Estate and aimed to help clients develop their language skills in a relaxed and sociable environment; there was no football content at this time. Once the 12 weeks had been completed,

the group continued meeting for general activities which included a social element (e.g. shopping, cooking, trips to places of interest) as well as literacy and numeracy activities. These sessions were intended as an informal 'stepping stone' to help build clients' skills and confidence to the point where they were able to join formal education classes at a college or elsewhere. Many clients who were out of education did in fact go on to access college through participating in this programme.

In April 2012, a decision was made for AitC to offer football sessions to FFT clients. Initially, Arsenal staff had some training from FFT in how to work with this group of clients, and the FFT clinician attached to the partnership explained to his fellow clinicians within FFT the purpose and nature of the group, and invited them to refer appropriate clients. At the beginning, only about six clients joined the group, including a number who were already attending the ESOL sessions offered by AitC, but as time went on the number of referrals increased.

The sessions began on a small outdoor pitch at the Harvist Estate, which was located very close to the FFT centre. After several months, the sessions moved to a larger pitch at Elthorne Park. This shift had some unexpected effects, in that the group would meet at the FFT centre and travel together on the bus to Elthorne Park, then travel back in the same way after the session – the bus journeys provided opportunities for informal conversations before and after the football sessions. Another unexpected effect of the move was that some clients no longer attended the sessions, perhaps because of the travelling involved. At one point the numbers dropped to only four regular attenders, so the group was combined with another Arsenal group using Elthorne Park pitches at the same time. This group was for adults with learning difficulties, and the players were generally not as physically able as the FFT players. The FFT players took care to encourage and support the players from the other group, which was an interesting experience

in terms of strengthening their empathic skills. After some time, the numbers of FFT clients attending the sessions grew to eight, so the two groups separated. Since then, the momentum of the AitC/ FFT group has continued and the numbers have continued to increase.

In May 2015, the football group moved to the new indoor pitch at the Hub (the AitC centre, next to the main stadium). One of the key benefits of the move was that the players have changing rooms, so there is more privacy. This is especially beneficial for players who are self-conscious about scars on their bodies. There is more equipment, so the staff are able to run fitness sessions as well as football training. Also, as players become more comfortable in the AitC environment, they become more open to connecting with other activities taking place there, so enabling them to develop skills and mix with a wider range of people.

The football group has not been directly funded. Neither FFT nor AitC receive any funding to release the staff who are attached to the project. The only element which is funded is the travel costs of participants to the ESOL session, which the Arsenal Foundation cover. FFT pay the travel costs for the football sessions, but there is no funding specifically for that purpose. The programme runs on the goodwill and commitment of both organisations.

The partnership between FFT and Arsenal is unusual in that FFT do not just refer clients to the football group and leave AitC to provide the service, but staff from both organisations continue to work together to support the players and each other. This partnership approach is perceived as crucial by both staff and players. In the football sessions, there is considerable scope for emotions to be triggered, and the FFT clinician attached to the group helps the AitC coaches to reflect on the factors which underlie such occurrences and to consider how best to manage them. The presence of the FFT clinician at all the football sessions gives both the players and the

AitC staff confidence that challenging situations will be managed effectively.

Although the partnership has evolved organically as the football group has developed, there was a deliberate intention from the outset to combine the FFT psychotherapy and the AITC social models to create a strong psychosocial framework for the football project. Changes have been made to the role of the partners as the group has developed. For example, initially the FFT clinician participated directly in the football sessions, until it was felt it would be more useful for him to be present on the sidelines during sessions, to observe and provide support to players and coaches - so maintaining the therapeutic focus. This flexibility and ability to respond to the changing needs of the group is perceived by those involved as being a key factor in its success.





## D. The Football Group in 2017

The football group has now been functioning for five years, and numbers currently vary between 15 and 25 players attending each session<sup>3</sup>. The sessions take place every Monday afternoon at the Hub.

### Referrals and turnover within the group

Clients are referred to the group by their clinician at FFT, with whom they are engaging in individual or group therapy. The only criteria for referral are that the client has an interest in joining the group, and is physically able to play. The physical requirements of group membership are minimal; clients do not have to be physically fit to join the group, but it has to be medically safe for them to play. Clients do not need to speak English in order to join.

When a client is referred to the football group, one of the AitC staff working with the group goes to meet the client with their clinician before they first come to the Hub, so that they can ask questions, they know somebody who will welcome them when they come to the group, and they feel more comfortable about joining. They are then invited to come to the next Monday session. This personal approach is crucial since the isolation and lack of trust in others which is characteristic of many FFT clients is a significant barrier to them joining a new group.

Up to now, the group has been able to remain open to new members without requiring existing members to leave. Players tend to leave when they get a job or a college place, although they often come back to visit the group when they can. Once players engage with the group, many remain committed for a long period of time.

### Participants

The members of the football group are very

diverse in terms of age, physical fitness and football skills. On average, players are older than those in other AitC groups.

After a session in September 2017, a 'bleep test' was conducted to assess the range of fitness levels within the group<sup>4</sup>. The number of runs completed by the 17 players who participated ranged between 1.4 and 10.9. The distribution of results is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Range of 'bleep test' results:

| Number of runs completed | Number of players |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| less than 2              | 1                 |
| 2.1-4                    | 0                 |
| 4.1-6                    | 1                 |
| 6.1-8                    | 8                 |
| 8.1-10                   | 5                 |
| 10.1-12                  | 2                 |

These results confirm that the group is accessed by FFT clients with a wide range of fitness levels. Players themselves were asked to rate how physically fit they felt they were, and self-perceived fitness was also found to vary considerably within the group, with approximately one-third rating themselves as a little fit, quite fit and very fit. No player rated themselves as 'not at all fit'<sup>5</sup>.

Players were also asked to rate how good they thought their football skills were. Again, there was a wide range of self-perceived skill levels within the group, with approximately one third of the group rating their skills as 'OK', one third 'quite good' and one third 'very good'<sup>6</sup>.

The group is theoretically open to both men and women, but in practice women do not join. One woman came to the football sessions but did not have the confidence to take part.

### Group culture

There are very few expectations of players in the group. The informal expectations, according to staff attached to the group, are to treat others

as you would want to be treated yourselves; to participate and have a certain level of commitment; try to be on time and speak English.

All those who come to a session are expected to participate in some way. If they are not able to play due to injury, for example, they contribute in other ways (e.g. sort bibs, encourage the players). If staff tolerate certain players not participating during the sessions, or arriving consistently late, this can cause problems within the group as these players are perceived to be receiving special treatment. Group members are understanding of their colleagues who have problems, but they also expect a certain level of commitment to the group.

Commitment is particularly respected, but other elements of the group culture include encouragement, respect, talking to each other (especially when any problems occur), humour, taking care of each other.

Other AitC groups require participants to behave in line with a Code of Conduct (see Annex 1). Initially, the FFT football group members did not sign the Code of Conduct, because it was perceived to be too stringent for those recovering from experiences of torture, but during the period of this evaluation it has been introduced. It outlines what AitC expects of its group members, and what group members can expect of AitC.

### Structure of the football sessions

The group is seen as a therapeutic activity, with an emphasis on psychosocial wellbeing rather than on physical fitness or football skills. Therefore, the sessions focus on providing a safe environment in which players can enjoy the activities and strengthen their overall wellbeing (e.g. physical, social, emotional). The players, however, see the sessions as an enjoyable opportunity to play football; the therapeutic elements are integrated into the sessions in a way which makes them 'invisible' to an observer who is not already aware of this aspect of the group.

Each session begins with warm-up activities, which have a focus on teamwork and communication. Players are given responsibilities during warm-ups, and they do activities in small teams. This is followed by short matches. The staff divide the players into three or more teams, and two teams play while the other team rests. Sometimes a player will take the role of referee during these matches. The session ends with a 'cool down', which aims to facilitate both physical cooling down, and cooling any emotions which may have been heightened during the session. Staff also share information which needs to be communicated to players (e.g. about future events), and address issues which may have arisen during the session.

Once or twice a year, a 'reflective session' takes place, in which staff and group members discuss how they feel things are going. It provides an opportunity for the players to remind themselves and each other that the group is not only about football but also about taking care of each other. The FFT clinician plays a key role in these sessions.

Connecting the players to other opportunities within Arsenal in the Community

Until clients obtain their 'right to remain' or refugee status, their involvement with the FFT/ Arsenal football group is limited to attending the football session. However, once a client obtains their 'right to remain', the AitC staff start looking for opportunities to link the client to other aspects of their programme, in particular the Employability project. This teaches work skills and can lead to various forms of employment afterwards, such as in the catering and retail sectors. Through the course, players also meet new people who are not FFT clients, which increases their confidence.

Some players take the FA Level 1 coaching badges, and this can be a big confidence boost. However, the numbers who do this are limited because it can raise hopes that they may be employed by AitC to work on their projects, and

there are not enough employment opportunities to allow this.

Records show AITC/FFT players have achieved the following qualifications:

- First Aid Certificate (10 players)
- Employability (BTEC Level 1 in Work Skills, Literacy and Numeracy) (8)
- FA Level 1 coaching Certificate (7)
- Child Protection / Safeguarding Certificate (7)
- SIA Door Supervision Licence (6)
- Health and Safety Certificate (5)
- Wembley to Soweto Photography course (5)
- Referred onto Arsenal Development football programme (4)
- Referred onto England Street Football Team (1)

<sup>3</sup> In the five sessions for which information was recorded by coaches in August/ September 2017, the numbers attending were 22 (plus 4 who attended but did not play); 18 (and 3 who attended but did not play); 14; 18 (and 2 who attended but did not play); and 19 (and 2 who attended but did not play).

<sup>4</sup> See Annex 2 for a description of the bleep test and how it is scored.

<sup>5</sup> 9 players rated themselves as 'a little fit'; 7 rated themselves as 'quite fit'; and 9 rated themselves as 'very fit'.

<sup>6</sup> One player rated their football skills as 'Not good'; 8 players rated their skills as 'OK'; 8 players rated their skills as 'Quite good'; and 9 players rated their skills as 'Very good'.





## E. How the Football Group Works: A Programme Model

In this section, we describe the way the football group can benefit those who participate ('outcomes')<sup>7</sup>. Eight main outcomes were identified. These describe aspects of thoughts, feelings and behaviour which can be influenced by participation in the football group, although, of course, not all players will benefit in the same ways from their involvement. Some of the outcomes are inter-related, in that progress towards one is connected with progress towards another. These relationships are described below, and illustrated in Figure 1.

### Feeling safe

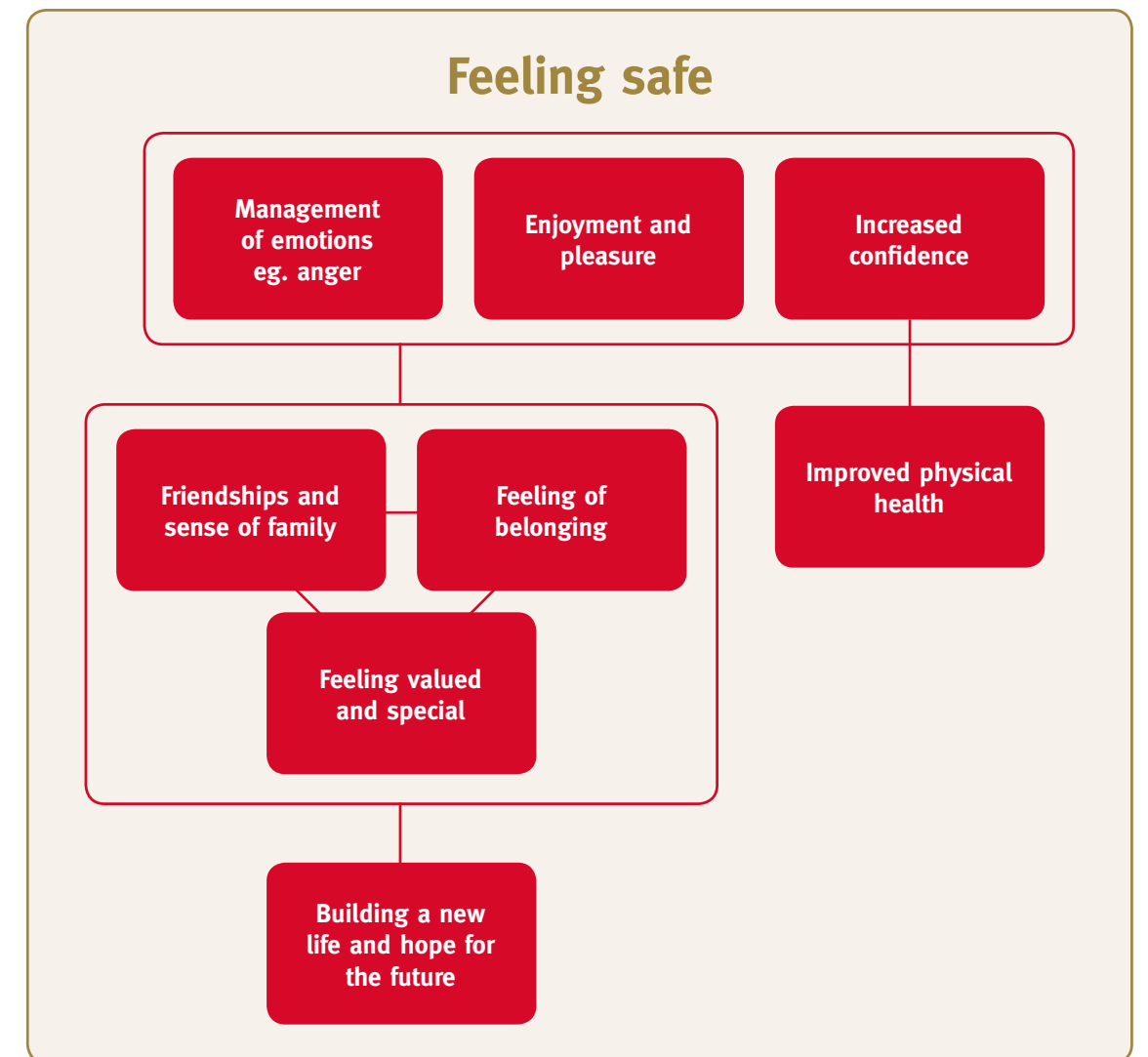
The feeling of safety that players have while they are participating in the football sessions is crucial to the effectiveness of the football group, and to the achievement of the other outcomes. Players say they feel safe when they are at the FFT centre, which is to be expected since part of its function is to enhance feelings of safety, but they say they feel equally safe at the Hub. The partnership between FFT and AitC is an important part of this; the players still feel supported by FFT because a FFT staff member attends each football session. However, they also feel safe when attending other trainings or sessions at the Hub, even where FFT staff are not present.

In the Hub and in the FFT centre, when I walk inside I feel relaxed, safe. I'm a different person. When I'm outside I don't feel safe. (Player)

Safety is most important – when you're not safe, you can't do anything, you can't learn, you always feel stressed. (Player)

<sup>7</sup> See Annex 3 for a description of how this programme model was developed.

Figure 1. Football Group programme model: outcomes and relationships between them



Players feel safe because they believe that staff attached to the football group care about them and their problems. There are high levels of trust among players for the staff, and this is due partly to the staff's behaviour but also because they have been present consistently from the time the football group began.

Consistency is an important element in creating a safe environment, and within the football group there is an attempt to provide consistency in terms of approach, session content and staff. There is a relatively low turnover of players at this point in the group's development, so players know each other, and are known by other group members, and there is a solid group culture which enhances feelings of safety.

### Friendships & sense of family

Players commonly referred to the other players in the football group as their closest friends, or 'like family'. Many had arrived in the UK alone and found it difficult to connect with others and build relationships. The football group does not require players to talk about their problems, or to talk at all, so it can feel like a safe place to spend time with others. However, some communication is needed in order to play as a team, and over time most players start to chat to staff or other players, and relationships start to build.

*In the beginning, individuals want to demonstrate their own skills, and they would all sit separately in the waiting room. Over time, their confidence within the group grows – passing, working together, using each other's names, awareness of other people – they start to remove the defensive armour. (Staff)*

*When we come to this country we have no friends, no family, so we built that new family here. We come from different parts of the world, but once we're here we're seen as asylum seekers and refugees, so we have that in common. Forget about*

*where I come from, we have a common problem. So we support each other, emotionally, with advice. Sometimes I might have experience of something, and if somebody gets into that situation I might say 'I went through this, and this is how I went and how I was able to resolve it'. So we exchange contacts, we talk to each other, because at the time you have no friends, you don't have anyone. So the people here become your family. (Player)*

The fact that all group members are FFT clients, so have similar problems and understand the challenges that their fellow-players face, contributes to the feeling of safety within the group, as does the fact that there is a relatively low turnover so players have the opportunity to get to know each other over a period of time. It is only when players feel that they are in a safe environment that they are able to build relationships with others. The low turnover makes it easier for new players to integrate, and means the culture of the group is readily communicated.

*People come from different communities, we speak different languages but when we play we have one language, the language of football. (Player)*

### Feeling of belonging

The feeling of belonging is about a connection to something bigger than themselves which is perceived positively. Although players feel a sense of belonging with both FFT and Arsenal, there is some ambivalence about their belonging to FFT because this relates to a painful part of their identity. Their connection with Arsenal, on the other hand, is entirely positive, and is something they feel proud to let others know about. As one staff member put it, the players would not want to wear FFT t-shirts, but are proud to be seen wearing Arsenal shirts. Their connection with Arsenal gives them a new, more positive identity.

It has been noted that for torture survivors, their therapist can become a representative of the new country (Boyles, 2017), and for some members of the football group Arsenal is seen as a symbol of the UK. As a result, being accepted and valued by Arsenal has a broader significance.

*When I arrived in UK it wasn't easy to socialise, I didn't know anyone, even I didn't want to talk. But I feel like I belong to the UK because I belong to Arsenal. Arsenal is part of the history of the country, if I belong to Arsenal I belong to the country. (Player)*

*We are rejected in our own countries, but we came and found a new family that valued us, and gave us something that we never thought of. Once you are alone in your little tiny room here, as an asylum seeker, you have no-one around you, so Arsenal says 'come, we are here', you interact with so many people. You go to the match, you have 50,000 people around you. You know very well you cannot do it yourself, so somebody did that for you, somebody considered you as a human. It gives you that sense of belonging to a group. (Player)*

The football group activities take place next to Emirates Stadium in the heart of an Arsenal facility, creating a further sense of connectedness to the club. The special events that players participate in, and the other opportunities they get through AitC strengthen the feeling that they really belong to the club rather than just visiting the Hub once or twice a week for sessions. They feel that AitC staff care about their wellbeing, and do what they can to help them. The resulting sense of connection is strong, especially because some of the opportunities (e.g. the Employability programme) lead on to other positive changes in a player's life – so creating an ongoing sense that his wellbeing is due to his connection with Arsenal.

*That connection is for ever, especially because I was given opportunities by Arsenal which have led onto other changes in my life. (Player)*

*Even if I didn't come to the football sessions any more, if I got a job or went to college, I would still feel connected to the club. It's like a marriage, it doesn't end. (Player)*

A number of players (27) completed a questionnaire after one of the football sessions, in which they were asked to list the three things they liked best about FFT, and the three things they liked best about AitC. The emotional support and therapy offered by FFT was appreciated by a large proportion of players (9), but FFT was also said to be a place where players felt generally welcomed and cared for, and where people wanted to help them (mentioned by 12 players).

Three aspects of AitC were mentioned frequently in responses: the friendships which resulted from their engagement with the organisation (11 players); the courses and opportunities for work which they were offered (10); and the opportunity to play football (9). Other aspects which were appreciated include the English class and other opportunities to improve their English (6); the good relationships with AitC staff (5); and the feeling of welcome and belonging, often referred to as feeling 'like home' (5).

The responses to the questionnaire indicate that players clearly feel a strong sense of belonging to FFT as an organisation, and feel accepted and cared for by the staff. However, during individual and group discussions few players talked about this sense of belonging in relation to FFT, which may be because they know that the organisation exists in order to care for survivors of torture so they expect to be welcomed and accepted there. They did not necessarily have the same expectation of AitC, so although fewer players mentioned 'belonging' on the questionnaire in relation to Arsenal, several described this feeling



in very vivid terms during interviews and group discussions. It may be, therefore, that feeling of belonging in relation to Arsenal has a particularly significant impact on players because it is unexpected and is related to the perception of the club as being, to some extent, representative of the UK as a whole. It is worth noting that the Mission of AitC, developed many years ago, is 'A Sense of Belonging', so this element of the programme model will be of particular relevance to the organisation.

### Feeling valued & special

All players knew Arsenal Football Club in their home countries, and many supported Arsenal, so being part of the club in some way feels very special. The fact that they are able to attend matches, when they know that many people do not get this chance, and go to special events and receive Arsenal kit makes them feel privileged.

*We feel special – other people don't get the chance to go in the stadium. (Player)*

*This football we are doing, it gave me new life. When I left home to come here, I was struggling too much with my asylum seeker matters. I found out people don't like me, maybe my life doesn't make any sense at all. And then I lost my happiness. So honestly, when I start to come and play football here, they gave me the value I lost before. (Player)*

*When I'm walking the street I feel like a big man, because I'm a member of Arsenal. (Player)*

### Building a new life and hope for the future

One player described participating in the football group as enabling him to start building new, good memories from his time in the UK, instead of all his good memories being of the people and places he had left behind.

*When I came to the UK my brain was full of old memories, thinking only of the place I came from. It takes time to start*

*collecting new memories – now I dream about my time here, instead of at home. Coming to the football group gave me a starting point, a way to start collecting new memories. (Player)*

Through their involvement with the FFT/ AitC football group, players have access to many other projects which help them to develop new skills and could potentially lead to employment, college courses or other positive changes. Participation in courses like the 'Employability' course run by AitC, or the security training, or photography course, was described by some players as being the start of a process of building a new life.

*I was given opportunities by Arsenal which have led onto other changes in my life. (Player)*

For some, the opportunities they were given alongside the football group helped them to develop personally in positive ways.

*Through the photography course I got confidence. For example, I was working with people with disabilities and learned a lot through doing that. (Player)*

*When I was on the coaching course, I learned more about managing my emotions. (Player)*

### Management of emotions (especially anger)

A number of players and staff members noted that one of the changes commonly observed as people become involved with the football group is that they learn to manage their emotions. When players first join, some regularly over-react to the actions of other players during matches, but over time they learn to manage their feelings.

*One player, every session he would take a foul, he would totally kick off, 'right, I'm leaving'. Now his behaviour has changed completely ... and he puts that down to the group – he says this is his family. (Staff)*

*I used to be very angry. When I came to the football group, [the AitC coaches] advised me, and I listened to them because we are friends, family. Now I understand that if someone tackles me it might just be a mistake, but before I used to think it was deliberate. I was a madman. Now I try to avoid conflict. (Player)*

The behaviour of Arsenal and FFT staff, and the way in which they model calm behaviour, was referred to frequently by players as an important factor in their learning to manage their own emotions. Their friendships with other players was also important, as they understood the challenges that each other faced and why they might sometimes behave in a way which seems aggressive.

*We've been through the same things, so we know how to manage each other. I know I need to manage my anger because other people are going through the same kind of problems as me. (Player)*

*The staff are great, I've never seen them angry. Even if you're an angry person, being around them teaches me to be calm. I love the way they control the atmosphere – they know we have problems, they are patient. (Player)*

The staff are very aware of the need to manage heightened emotions during the football sessions, and the close working relationship between the AitC staff and the FFT clinician is an important part of this. They have regular conversations about issues arising within the group, or for certain individuals, and how best to understand and manage them. In one of the five sessions monitored by an AitC coach<sup>8</sup>, two players behaved aggressively, and the coaching staff managed the issue by initially stopping the game to speak to the players involved, and then speaking to players privately at the end of the session.

*If something kicks off during a session we judge how to deal with it. We might stop the game for a while to bring emotions*

*back down, or we might wait until the end and deal with it as a group. We also have individual conversations with the client who is having trouble managing his emotions. (Staff)*

It is only within a safe environment where they feel supported and accepted that players can learn to manage their feelings.

### Enjoyment & pleasure

Players frequently said that regardless of the challenges they were facing in their lives, during the time they were with the football group they did not think about their problems, they just enjoyed playing football. For some, they said that they started worrying again as soon as the football session was over, but others they said that even after the session they felt good.

*We have different problems. We come together, enjoy the football and we forget everything. Whether we've had bad news, whatever, we forget while we're in the session. It's like medicine. (Player)*

*When I'm playing football I feel well, no problems with immigration, no problems with my family, I'm so happy. I forget everything. When I finish, I go out, I have no friends, the problems come again, thinking too much. (Player)*

*'You know, sometimes you can spend a week, you don't laugh. Or you spend a week, you don't have people that speak to you. But the hour you spend in there, someone will talk to you, someone will make you laugh. It's a huge difference. That's very special' (Player).*

In a questionnaire completed by 27 players<sup>9</sup>, they were asked to rate how much they enjoyed the football sessions by choosing one of the following options: not at all; a little; quite a lot; very much. Twenty-five players completed this item: 22 said they enjoyed the sessions 'very much', and three enjoyed them 'quite a lot'.



Of particular note is the way in which the staff have been able to create an enjoyable environment for a group of players with considerable diversity in terms of physical fitness and football skills. The players who responded to the questionnaire were also asked to rate how good they thought their football skills and how physically fit they felt they were. The results indicate a wide range of self-perceived skill levels and fitness levels within the group (see Section D). Yet almost all said they enjoyed the football sessions 'very much', which suggests that the coaches are able to manage the sessions so that all can participate fully, regardless of skill or fitness level<sup>9</sup>. This is a considerable achievement on the part of the coaching team.

### Builds confidence

When players joined the football group they were often isolated, physically unfit and feeling low in energy as well as emotionally. Through engagement with the football group, and the process of reconnecting with their physical selves and with the staff and other players, they begin to develop the energy and the confidence to engage with other opportunities, or even to seek them out.

*'After the football, during the week, my mood, not that it was better but it was a bit different. Because I've done a bit of exercise, I've relaxed my brain, and any body organ unless you exercise it it becomes an issue. So the fact that I was running on Monday, the following day was more relaxing, so it was helping me to be more positive, so I said, OK, if I can do football, why not go for English school? You try to do more to come to yourself, because you wake up on Tuesday morning, you feel more energetic, you want to do something else on that day' (Player).*

<sup>9</sup> See Annex 4 for a description of this process.

<sup>9</sup> See Annex 4 for a description of this process.

<sup>10</sup> Of the three who said they enjoyed the sessions 'quite a lot', one rated their football skills as 'OK', one as 'quite good' and one as 'very good'; in their responses to the question on fitness, one rated their physical fitness as 'a little fit'; one as 'quite fit'; and one as 'very fit'. This supports the suggestion that enjoyment of the sessions is not related to physical fitness or football skill.

### Improved physical health

The final outcome is improved physical health. Through attending the football sessions every week, players are physically active and this has a positive impact on other aspects of their wellbeing, such as sleep and appetite.

*I love playing football, exercise is good for my body. I sleep better. (Player)*

*When I go on Monday I come back home, I'll be tired on that Monday, I will have my shower I'll be tired on that Monday night. But following week I feel more relaxed, I have more energy during the week. But if I miss on Monday, then the whole week I'm so tired. (Player)*

One player has a physical disability and he received individual support initially but now his health has improved to the point where he is able to join in the group sessions. He feels that this participation has had a very positive impact on his physical health, as well as his emotional wellbeing.





## F. Impact of the Football Group on Wellbeing

In order to assess the impact of the football group on players' wellbeing, it would be necessary to have a measure of their wellbeing when they joined the group (a baseline measure), and a second measure at one or more points afterwards. However, baseline data is not available for this group. Therefore, a range of other information was gathered to try to build a picture retrospectively of the ways in which players changed during their time with the football group<sup>11</sup>. We cannot draw firm conclusions about the impact of the football group without baseline data, but where we see consistency in the findings across the different sources of information available, we can have some confidence that they point towards a meaningful area of change.

FFT conduct initial assessments when clients are first referred to them, and they continue to assess the psychosocial wellbeing of clients participating in individual therapy at regular intervals<sup>12</sup>. This information was available for 44 clients who had been referred to and had engaged with the football group, and for 16 who had been referred but had not engaged.

For 15 of the clients who engaged with the group, assessments of their psychosocial wellbeing were available from before they joined the group, and again from some point afterwards. Comparison of the 'before' and 'after' assessments show very little difference in reported levels of distress or wellbeing before and after joining the football group. Perhaps this is not surprising, since there are many factors impacting on the wellbeing of FFT clients, and participation in the football group may play a small but positive role within the broader context of their lives.

At the beginning of the assessment process, clients are asked to describe in their own words what has most affected how they felt over the

previous one month, thinking both about things that have made them feel good and things that have made them feel bad. Of the 44 clients who engaged with the football group, their most recent assessment was reviewed to identify which factors they said had contributed, either positively or negatively, to their emotional wellbeing over the previous one month<sup>13</sup>. The aim of this analysis was to find out whether any factors related to their participation in the football group were highlighted.

It was found that a large proportion of the clients who had engaged with the football group said that social issues and purposeful activity had made them feel good over the last one month. Clients did not, however, consistently mention physical health as having affected their emotional wellbeing, which we might have expected<sup>14</sup>.

Although the two groups are not directly comparable, the same analysis was conducted for the 16 clients who were referred to the football group but did not engage with it. For these clients, there was no clear effect of social issues, purposeful activity or physical health on their emotional wellbeing.

Whilst we must be careful in drawing conclusions from this comparison, it suggests that the social aspect of the football group, and the involvement in purposeful activity, may contribute to the emotional wellbeing of FFT clients who engage with the football group.

Players themselves were asked to list the three things they like best about the FFT/ AitC football group<sup>15</sup>. The feeling of being part of a family and of friendship was the aspect of the group mentioned by the greatest number of players (14 out of 25). Other aspects referred to include the friendly way they are treated by staff (7); the opportunity to socialise with different people (6); and the pleasure they got from playing football (6). Smaller numbers appreciated courses and other opportunities which they were offered due to their involvement with the football group (4),

and the chance to go on trips away (2). These factors, which were identified spontaneously by players (i.e. not through use of a checklist), support the findings outlined earlier from the FFT assessment data, in that social connections and purposeful activity are clear themes.

Torture affects all aspects of a survivors' life, with the impact on three areas being particularly significant: social wellbeing, psychological/emotional wellbeing, and physical wellbeing (Kira, 2002). The findings in relation to these areas of life are explored in more detail in the following sections.

### Social wellbeing

Studies on different traumatic experiences, different cultures, different genders, and different age groups found that both experience and perception of positive social support predicted lower symptoms of distress (Kira, 2002; Hobfoll et al, 2007). Social support provides opportunities for 'practical problem solving, emotional understanding and acceptance, sharing of traumatic experiences, normalization of reactions and experiences, and mutual instruction about coping' (Hobfoll et al, 2007: 296). On the basis of this, there is a consensus that interventions which strengthen social support can have a significant impact on the recovery of torture survivors.

'Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives' (van der Kolk, 2014: 79).

Players who were interviewed consistently referred to the importance of the relationships they developed with their fellow-players, and with staff involved with the football group, as described in Section E. In order to gather more systematic information on the role played by the football group in developing players' social networks, a section was included in the

questionnaire completed by players on who they would go to for various kinds of social support (emotional support; practical support; legal or bureaucratic support; sharing happy times)<sup>16</sup>. Only 18 players completed this section of the questionnaire, and the responses suggested that some had not understood it fully. However, their responses indicate that:

- Friends in the football group, FFT staff and AitC staff are an important source of emotional support for at least half of the players who responded to this part of the questionnaire.
- Many players do not have anybody who can help them with practical issues such as childcare.
- FFT staff (and AitC staff) are the main source of help with legal/ bureaucratic issues such as problems with housing.
- More than half of the players who responded said they would invite their friends from the football group to a celebration – considerably more than would invite friends from elsewhere.

This data, although it is limited, supports the claim made by some players that the FFT/ AitC football group is an important source of social support for them. For some, it may be their main or only source of social support.

The FFT clinician attached to the football group rated 26 current players' behaviour during sessions, with three of the questions relating to social behaviour<sup>17</sup>. More than half (15) interacted with other players 'quite a lot' during sessions, with the others evenly split between those who had lower levels of interaction (5) and higher levels (6). No player was rated as not interacting at all with others; the nature of the football sessions makes it necessary for players to interact with others to some extent, so building confidence and relationships. There was a very similar pattern of responses in ratings of players' team orientation (i.e. prioritising the success of the team over their own personal success),

indicating that most players had a connection with others on the pitch.

The FFT clinician was also asked to rate how supportive players were of others who were struggling in some way, either emotionally or physically, since being able to empathise with and help others is an important element of social connectedness. There was more variation here, with 16 of the 26 players being ‘moderately’ or ‘a little’ supportive, and the remaining 10 being ‘quite’ or ‘very’ supportive. It is perhaps to be expected that players who are still struggling with their own problems find it more difficult to support others.

However, it is interesting that there is a very close relationship between the three elements of social wellbeing (interaction with others; team orientation; supporting others), indicating that these behaviours develop together<sup>18</sup>. All three aspects of social wellbeing are also closely related to how much a player usually participates in the sessions, as rated by the FFT clinician, with those who have higher levels of participation also showing higher levels of positive social behaviour<sup>19</sup>. This suggests that players who consistently attend football sessions and actively participate in the activities are those who are more likely to develop positive social behaviours. We cannot draw firm conclusions from this data, but it does suggest that there is a link between participation during football sessions and positive social behaviours.

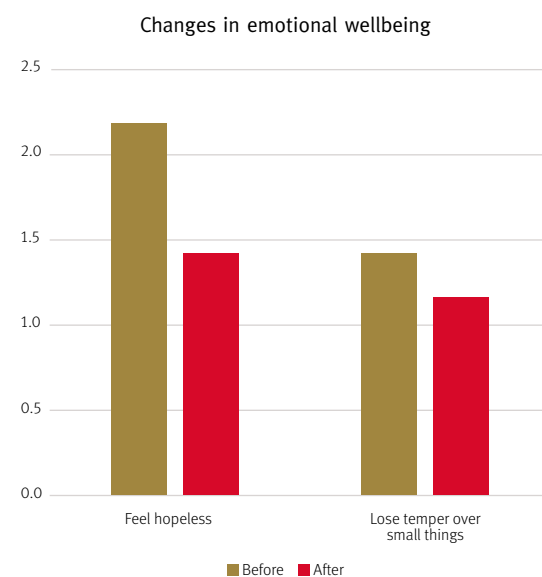
A further finding is that there is no relationship between positive social behaviours and football skills, according to the FFT clinician’s ratings of players’ behaviour. It appears that players of all abilities are able to have positive relationships with other players, without there being any discrimination against those whose football skills are less strong. This provides further support for the observation made earlier in this report relating to the coaches’ ability to enable all players to feel valued and included, regardless of their ability to play football.

### Emotional wellbeing

As noted in Section B of this report, emotional consequences of torture can include symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, plus feelings of anger, guilt and shame, and mistrust of others and the world in general (Boyles, 2017; Williams & van der Merwe, 2013).

The assessment of clients’ wellbeing conducted regularly by FFT (referred to above) includes questions about whether the client loses their temper over small things and whether they feel hopeless. These are two important elements of emotional wellbeing for FFT clients who participate in the football group. Assessment data from before and after they joined the football group was only available for 11 players for these two questions, but the average responses for these 11 players are shown in the chart below. A higher score indicates that they are more likely to have experienced these emotional responses over the previous week; the blue bar shows their responses before joining the football group and the red bar shows their responses afterwards.

Figure 2. Responses to emotional wellbeing questions before and after joining the foot



The numbers in the chart relate to response options, with ‘1’ indicating ‘a little’ and ‘2’ indicating ‘quite a lot’. It can be seen that there is a significant change in hopelessness over the time period; before joining the group the average response was that they had felt hopeless ‘quite a lot’ over the previous week, but this had reduced when they were asked after having been participating in the football group for some time. This is in line with players’ reports that their involvement with AitC, and the opportunities associated with this (including non-football related opportunities, such as training and English classes), contributed to their seeing positive possibilities for the future (as reported in Section E).

During individual interviews and group discussions, players reported that over-reactions to challenges were common when people first joined the football group, but this tended to decrease over time, as they found ways to manage their emotions. The chart shows that players did not tend to lose their temper over small things very often even before they joined the football group, and that this decreased slightly over the period they participated in the football sessions. The phased approach to recovery referred to earlier includes the development of emotion management strategies and skills during the first phase, ‘stabilisation’, so it is likely that players would have addressed this issue to some extent with their therapist before being referred to the football group. In a group context, especially a football game, those skills and strategies are tested in a new way and a player may struggle to manage their emotions initially. This demonstrates the importance of the FFT/ AITC partnership, in that the player can raise these issues with their FFT therapist and develop their emotion management skills further<sup>20</sup>.

The FFT clinician attached to the football group rated 26 current players’ management of their emotions during sessions<sup>21</sup>. High levels of respect for opponents and officials were recorded (24 of the 26 players showed ‘quite a lot’ of respect or were ‘very’ respectful). This indicates that the players, who had been part of the group for

varying lengths of time, were able to manage their emotions to the extent necessary to interact in a positive way with others. There was more variation in how often players were said to lose their temper during football sessions, with around two thirds (17) losing their tempers ‘not at all’ or ‘a little’, and the other one-third (9) losing their tempers ‘moderately’ often or ‘quite’ often. It is interesting, and to be expected, that these two aspects of behaviour were found to be closely related<sup>22</sup>, with players who were more able to control their tempers showing higher levels of respect for others. This indicates that when players learn to manage their emotions in a football context, there is an associated improvement in their social interactions.

### Physical wellbeing

Torture survivors often report that their bodies are broken and permanently damaged, and may perceive themselves as physically weak, so avoid walking or any movement that causes discomfort (Boyles, 2017). This can exacerbate feelings of poor physical wellbeing, as their bodies become even weaker and less resilient. According to Boyles (2017), in many cultures physical pain is seen as a sign of damage and decline, and for some the pain signifies that the torturers have been successful in perpetrating long-term damage. Therefore, any intervention which involves physical activity and builds survivors’ confidence in their bodies is likely to also have an impact on their emotional wellbeing. Playing football enables survivors of torture to ‘reconnect with their bodies in a physical way that was familiar from the past and grounded them in the present’ (Dutton, 2017: 278). Van der Kolk (2014) concluded that survivors of traumatic experiences needed not only to talk about their feelings and experiences, but also to have physical experiences in order to regain a sense of control.

During group and individual discussions with players, they rarely referred to the impact of the football group on their physical wellbeing. The



exceptions to this were those who had physical health problems (e.g. diabetes); these players described how involvement with the group had helped to improve their health. However, FFT staff were aware that physical health problems were an area of concern for many clients. In order to explore in more detail the ways in which clients' physical wellbeing is affected by their involvement in the football group, a physiotherapy intern with FFT analysed clients' assessment data and conducted individual interviews with a number of players<sup>24</sup>. Initially, he explored the physical health issues reported by 30 players when they were first assessed by FFT (i.e. before they joined the football group). Three of these did not report any physical health issues at first assessment, whilst the other 27 reported between one and five physical health issues which were affecting them at that point.

#### *Physical wellbeing of FFT clients*

Twelve of the 30 clients reported some kind of musculoskeletal pain when first assessed, and in all but one case this was directly a result of assaults inflicted during torture. Other commonly-reported issues were headaches (8 clients), back pain (8 clients) and global body pain (4 clients). Cardiovascular issues (e.g. high blood pressure) affected five clients, and four reported respiratory problems (e.g. TB, asthma). All these physical problems are likely to have an impact on their ability to participate in sports, yet all were able to engage with the football group at some point. FFT works with health care providers to ensure that clients receive the medical treatment they need, so the physical wellbeing of many of these clients would have improved before they were referred to the football group.

#### *Effect of participating in football group on physical wellbeing*

However, the physiotherapy intern conducted in-depth interviews with five FFT clients who were currently involved with the football group,

focusing specifically on physical issues, and several were still experiencing physical health problems when they were referred to the group. For example, one said that when he joined the football group 'I was getting some sickness because of the torture, headache, backaches and nose bleeds'. All were physically unfit when they joined the group, since they had been inactive for a long period of time. Some were initially apprehensive about whether they would be able to play, and about the possibility of being injured.

The players interviewed said that through their involvement in the football group, they experienced an increase in their physical wellbeing (e.g. increased energy, improved sleep, feeling fitter and stronger). Those who still suffered from physical problems when they were referred to the group said that these either improved or were completely eliminated over the time they were with the group. For example, one player said that the problems with his legs improved until he no longer needed to attend physiotherapy sessions, and a player who had had a stroke said that his gait and balance improved through his participation in the football sessions. Players talked in particular about the positive impact of the group on physical symptoms of stress, such as headaches.

#### *Reconnecting with the body*

Although the football sessions are intended to be supportive rather than competitive, often the players are focused on winning their game, and it can become very physical (e.g. hard tackles). Given that survivors of torture often experience a disconnection with their bodies, it is of interest that most of those interviewed were not concerned about the physicality of the game while they were participating, or were willing to accept the risk of being hurt.

The players' feelings about their bodies were explored during interview. Most said that initially they had felt that their bodies were not

fit enough or strong enough to perform the way they wanted to, with one saying he was initially frustrated at his body being 'inadequate'. However, for all of them this changed as they continued to participate, as they developed a belief that their bodies can recover and become stronger. One player said that playing now makes him feel good physically, and he said that he now feels that he loves his body. There was a sense amongst the players interviewed of being strong when they play, and of overcoming the physical impairments they had previously experienced. There was an overall positive perception of what their bodies are now capable of.

Some said that through the football group they had been able to develop a more positive connection with their bodies even outside the group. They described how they consciously make healthy decisions, such as to walk instead of take the bus. For example, one client said 'Now I walk to get some fitness – football group helped me to do the thing I was hating', and another said 'now I make a plan to run in the park every Saturday ... I have to find a way to maintain fitness'. This is in line with research on other forms of physical activity: van der Kolk (2014) reports that after a yoga programme with women who had severe trauma histories, they reported a great improvement in their relationships with their bodies, saying things like 'I now take care of my body' (p270).

<sup>22</sup> The Measure of Change and Outcome (MOCO) is a tool used by Freedom from Torture to assess the ways in which clients' psychosocial wellbeing changes as they participate in individual therapy. It involves an assessment of those factors which clients feel have contributed to their emotional wellbeing (either positively or negatively) over the previous one month; and a series of questions about their feelings and behaviour (indicators of distress and wellbeing) over the previous one week. Each client completes the MOCO together with their therapist at regular intervals.

<sup>23</sup> This data was not available for three clients who had joined the football group recently so the analysis was of data from 41 clients.

<sup>24</sup> See Annex 4 for more details about these findings.

<sup>25</sup> See Annex 4 for details of this process.

<sup>26</sup> See Annex 4 for details of this process.

<sup>27</sup> The questions were: 'How much does he interact with other players during sessions?'; 'How supportive is he of other players who are struggling in some way (either emotionally or physically)?'; 'Is he a good team player? (i.e. prioritises the success of the team over his own personal success)'.

<sup>28</sup> Pearson correlations: interaction and team orientation  $r=.58$ ,  $p=.002$ ; team orientation and supporting others  $r=.51$ ,  $p=.008$ ; interaction and supporting others  $r=.57$ ,  $p=.002$ .

<sup>29</sup> Pearson correlation: participation and interaction  $r=.59$ ,  $p=.001$ ; participation and team orientation  $r=.52$ ,  $p=.006$ ; participation and supporting others  $r=.51$ ,  $p=.008$ .

<sup>20</sup> It also illustrates the overlapping and cyclical nature of the phased approach to recovery, with individuals moving between the three phases multiple times as they progress.

<sup>21</sup> The questions were 'How often does he lose his temper during sessions?' and 'How respectful is he of opponents and officials?'

<sup>22</sup> Pearson correlation,  $r=-.64$ ,  $p<.001$

<sup>23</sup> See Annex 4 for details of this process.

## G. Key Factors in Effectiveness of the Football Group

There is a general consensus that activities which do not depend on expressing thoughts and feelings, such as sport, art, music and movement add a unique dimension to therapy because they have certain characteristics which are not always found in verbal approaches (Dutton, 2017). For many, the group itself is the therapeutic agent (e.g. Moreno, 1993), and the process of recovery requires the survivor to have the skills and opportunities to be in group, and to try something new without the risk of rejection (Dutton, 2017). Participating in a team sport promotes agency – knowing that what you do can make a difference – and a sense of community (van der Kolk, 2014).

Van der Kolk (2014) notes that whilst most therapeutic approaches focus on dealing with the effects of the past, it is equally important to enhance the quality of the day-to-day experience: ‘One reason that traumatic memories become dominant in [post-traumatic stress disorder] is that it’s so difficult to feel truly alive right now. When you can’t be fully here, you go to the places where you did feel alive – even if those places are filled with horror and misery’ (p73). He claims that interventions which help survivors to live fully in the present are crucial complements to approaches which focus more directly on addressing distressing thoughts and memories. The descriptions given by players of the ways in which the football group has benefitted them commonly included a description of enjoying themselves for a few hours, and focusing entirely on the game rather than on their problems.

*The time you’re playing football you don’t think about the difficulties in your life. The only thing is, your main concern that time is to enjoy your game, is to score goals or something like that, that’s the only thing you’re focused on that day. Probably you*

*might want to think, ‘oh my God, my papers’, but you see the ball is coming, and you forget about that for at least one or two hours, which is enough for the whole day. (Player)*

Dutton (2017) describes a football group he established with asylum seekers and refugees, many of whom were survivors of torture, and writes that ‘What became clear was that this weekly session allowed them to be with a group, to express the joy and pain of scoring or missing a goal, to have physical contact when they celebrated a goal, and begin to develop a life that felt normal, on a physical, emotional and social level ... [Football addresses the whole person – body, mind, emotion and spirit]. In terms of the physical, it allows players to reconnect physically with others by way of a pat on the back or warm embrace after scoring a goal. In terms of mental activity, it involves different ways of thinking, such as strategies for passing the ball or organising the team to defend or attack. Emotionally, it engenders expressions of joy and frustration, in a normal way. The spirit can be lifted by collective endeavour towards a common goal – a shared experience that can be spiritual in a simple way’ (p277).

Through the development of the programme model, and the other information gathered through this evaluation, it is possible to identify some of the main factors contributing to the effectiveness of the FFT/ AitC football group in terms of strengthening the psychosocial wellbeing of those who participate.

### i. Nature and structure of the football sessions

The staff are very aware that the group is therapeutic, rather than focusing on football skills or physical fitness, and make considerable efforts to ensure that the sessions are structured in a way that maintains a therapeutic approach.

This involves managing the sessions so that they do not become overly competitive, or focused around the particularly good players. There is no pressure on players to perform well in terms of

football skills; they can participate regardless of how good they are, and still enjoy the activity. Staff have adapted sessions to enable players who have special physical needs to participate alongside the others. They also regularly remind the players, especially the more competitive ones, that the aim of the games played during the sessions is not to win but to enjoy the time together, and for all to enjoy the activity.

*‘He [coach] keeps reminding me, ‘don’t forget, this is not a football team, this is a group, this is a friendly group, we don’t care about whether you know how to play or not, so don’t forget that. That’s the first thing you have to do. Our priority is to have fun together’. I say, oh man, but I want to win also! [laughs]’ (Player).*

Staff also make efforts to build and maintain a group culture which prioritises respect and participation. Those who participate in the sessions are not judged or criticised, and this creates a safe space in which they can relax and enjoy the session.

The fact that football is primarily a physical activity also contributes to the creation of a safe environment, since players can manage how much they communicate with each other. Staff try to encourage connection and communication between players, for example with ‘warm-up’ activities that involve calling other players’ names as they pass the ball to them, but there is no requirement for players to talk about anything other than the activity they are engaged with. This is essential to the success of the group with FFT clients who are struggling to trust others and build relationships. Importantly, opportunities for conversation are there for those who want to take them, so as clients become more confident and willing to take risks they are able to begin to connect with other people and build relationships in a slow way, which is determined entirely by their readiness to do so.

Football also facilitates the development of strategies to manage emotions, as players have

to learn to accept referees’ decisions which might go against them, and to tolerate mistakes made by their colleagues and by themselves. They learn these strategies partly through experience and engaging with the other players, but also through the direct support of staff who engage with players who become angry during a session. Staff also introduced a ‘cool down’ at the end of each session, so that any heightened emotions can be reduced before the players leave the Hub.

Playing football involves physical activity, of course, which has a positive impact on a number of areas of players’ wellbeing (e.g. sleep, appetite), and staff occasionally replace the football session with a fitness training session to enhance this element.

### ii. Participants with similar experiences

The football group is open only to FFT clients, and this is also crucial to its success. They have faced/ are facing similar challenges, which means that players feel comfortable with fellow-players and feel understood. It also means that there is tolerance within the group of behaviours that others might find difficult to understand (e.g. over-reaction to certain situations). Players understand and care about their fellow players, and try to help those who are having difficulty managing their emotions.

*‘They are your brothers. Because the thing that got you there is a common issue. Injustice. The main thing is injustice. And the discrimination. You speak the same language, and some days it’s easier to detect that someone among us is having a bad time, because you see the way that people will behave on that day. Sometimes they come in a low mood, and you know that probably he has received bad news or he has something that is hard for him at this time. We are all having more or less the same issue. You know how to act, you know how to converse with him about it’. (Player)*



As time goes on, the players can start to connect with other groups, both within and outside AitC, but the football group provides a safe foundation from which to do so.

A player from the group also took part in a Sunday league, and although he enjoyed it he found it difficult to connect with the other players, who were not asylum seekers and had very different lives to his.

*'After the Sunday game the team members they want to sit in the pub to have a drink. Often I will tell them that I don't want to drink, for two reasons. Firstly, I don't have money, but I don't want to say that I don't have money today. But secondly, I always feel that tomorrow Monday they will go back to work, they will go back to their family, I'm drinking and when I go home who am I talking to next?' (Player).*

### iii. Partnership between FFT and Arsenal in the Community

The partnership between FFT and AitC is also crucial to the effectiveness of the group. As noted earlier in this report, there is a general consensus that recovery from ongoing and complex distress involves three overlapping phases (stabilisation; trauma processing; reconnection), and an individual, with the support of a therapist, is likely to move between the three phases in a cyclical manner. One of the great strengths of the FFT/ AITC partnership is that clients continue to work with FFT clinicians as they engage with the football group, so as they begin to reconnect with others and with their own bodies, they can continue to explore with their clinician issues relating to earlier phases which emerge through this process. As clients work with AITC coaches, the ongoing support they receive from the FFT clinician who is present during football sessions, and their own therapists in the FFT centre, facilitates the overall process of recovery. The partnership is central to this process – neither organisation would be in a position to facilitate the process without the involvement of the other.

Although players feel a sense of belonging with both FFT and Arsenal, there is some ambivalence about their belonging to FFT because this relates to a painful part of their identity. Also, the welcome and acceptance they receive within FFT is something players value but also come to expect, since the purpose of the organisation is to help torture survivors. The welcome and acceptance they experience from AitC is less expected, and therefore seems to have a greater impact, especially because Arsenal is an internationally known and respected organisation. AitC, as a part of Arsenal Football Club, is seen as representing the UK to some extent, and for players who have felt rejected and marginalised by other institutions within the UK their acceptance by Arsenal is extremely significant. The fact that they are welcomed so warmly by staff, who demonstrably care about their wellbeing, makes players feel that they are a genuine part of the organisation, rather than just visiting once or twice a week.

The sense of belonging and feeling valued is strengthened by players being given opportunities to go to events that most other people do not get the chance to attend, such as matches, and to represent the club in tournaments. They are also linked to other opportunities, such as training courses and projects.

### iv. Staff characteristics

The qualities and behaviour of the staff associated with the football group are an essential element of the creation of a safe environment, within which players can start to become more confident, develop relationships, learn to manage their emotions, and strengthen their psychosocial wellbeing in other ways. The individual qualities and attributes of programme providers have been identified as key factors in supporting young people and adults to benefit from programmes in a variety of contexts. The characteristics commonly mentioned include being calm, compassionate, able to handle

crises, having concern for the participants' wellbeing 'including appropriate discipline, and consistent modelling of good behaviour' (Boothby et al, 2006: 99). The importance of building trusting and supportive relationships has been found to be an essential component of effective programmes (e.g. Lykes & Crosby, 2014).

The characteristics of the staff involved with the group which were consistently mentioned by players as being important were that they are calm and patient in all situations, providing exceptional modelling of positive behaviour, and show that they care about players and their problems. Initially this is through the use of the player's name when they first join the group, and a welcoming, friendly attitude towards them. As the staff get to know the players, they also show an interest in the situations affecting players and sometimes help out when problems occur. As van der Kolk (2014) states, social support is not just being in the presence of others, the critical issue is 'being truly heard and seen by the people around us, feeling that we are held in someone else's mind and heart' (p25). Staff interactions with the players communicate that they genuinely care about them, and this was mentioned regularly by players who were interviewed.

*[Coach] was so kind at the beginning ... Whenever he knows that you're coming, he knows your name, just the fact he calls you with your name makes a bit of difference. Oh, he knows that I was coming, you feel welcome. He often mentions your name, and at the beginning he calls the whole group to welcome you' (Player).*

In addition, the coaches and the FFT clinician attached to the group respond effectively to players who are struggling to manage their emotions during football sessions.

The FFT and AitC staff associated with the football group have been consistent over the five years that the group has been in existence, and this has been important in enabling trusting, respectful

relationships to develop. The strength of these relationships is necessary for staff to manage difficult situations effectively, and support the players as they learn to manage their emotions. It also builds players' confidence to engage with other activities.

*'Anything that I could do, I did it. Because I was already in the group so it was easier for me to join, to be more open because I knew [coach A], I knew [coach B], so when I go there I'm not a new person, so they call me. You know, you feel that someone knows you. You feel like, not that they are your friend but you share something with them' (Player).*

### v. Connection to other opportunities

The connection with other AitC projects is perceived to be an important element in players' ability to move forward, develop new skills and confidence, and have hope for the future.

Through their involvement with the football group, they are linked to other projects run by AitC: (e.g. Employability, first aid, security, photography) These projects are not only attended by FFT clients, so players have the opportunity to broaden their social network as well as develop their skills and confidence. The new skills developed are seen as the start of a process of building a new life, since they are generalisable and can be used in a variety of contexts, including employment.

### vi. Consistency

High levels of consistency - in terms of approach, session content and staff, and low turnover of players – contributes to the creation of a safe environment since players can attend sessions knowing what (and who) to expect. Dutton (2017) notes that in the football group he ran with refugees and asylum seekers, having sessions that followed the same format was important therapeutically, in that it brought predictability and containment so that trust could develop. Consistency allows relationships to be built slowly, and to be maintained over time.

## H. Conclusions and Recommendations

The aims of this evaluation are:

- To increase understanding of the Football Group approach
- To understand how much and in what ways the Football Group assists in recovery
- To identify future developments for the Football Group and the partnership between AitC and FFT.

In this final section of the evaluation report, we will draw some conclusions in relation to each of these aims.

### Understanding of the Football Group approach

The development of the Programme Model enabled the key outcomes of the football group to be identified, and the factors which contributed to these outcomes being achieved. The establishment of a safe environment is a crucial part of the programme, and the feelings of safety which are engendered amongst players enables them to achieve other outcomes. Players will, of course, benefit in different ways from their involvement with the football group, but there are certain benefits (outcomes) which were identified consistently by players and staff.

These include outcomes related to social connectedness, and feeling part of a group which understands, accepts and values them (developing friendships and sense of family; feeling of belonging; feeling valued and special). It also includes outcomes related to individual psychology and emotions, feeling more positive (enjoyment and pleasure; increased confidence) and being able to manage emotions, especially feelings of anger. Involvement with the football group facilitates access to other opportunities, so that players are able to develop a sense of hope for the future, and to work towards building a new life. Just as importantly, they are able to

improve their physical health and develop a more positive relationship with their bodies.

The nature and structure of the football sessions themselves makes a considerable contribution to the achievement of these outcomes. The group is primarily therapeutic, rather than focusing on football skills or physical fitness. As a result, the sessions are run in a way that ensures they are a safe space in which all players can relax, enjoy the sessions, and begin to find ways to connect with others and manage their emotions. The fact that other group members are all FFT clients, who have had similar experiences, is an important part of establishing and maintaining a safe space.

Characteristics and perceptions of the two organisations involved in running the football group are also important factors in achieving the desired outcomes. The partnership between FFT and AitC contributes to the sense of safety, since FFT is a consistent presence as the players begin to take risks in terms of connecting with others, and participating in other AitC activities. The feeling of being accepted and valued by Arsenal, as a well known and respected institution, plays a very important part in players beginning to develop feelings of confidence and self-worth. When players first join the group, Arsenal is embodied by the football coaching staff, and the way that these staff welcome players, and demonstrate that they care about them, is very important. Staff also play a crucial role in modelling positive behaviour, particularly management of emotions and good relationships. The safe space created by staff is strengthened by high levels of consistency in terms of approach, session content, staff attached to the group and low turnover of players.

A final element of the programme which contributes to positive outcomes, is that players involved with the football group are linked to other projects run by AitC, which enables them to develop new skills and confidence, and hope for the future.

### How much and in what ways the Football Group assists in recovery

As discussed earlier in this report (Section B), the AitC and FFT football group offers opportunities for its members to work towards recovery through some important elements of reconnection (Lamb, 2017), including:

- reclaiming a physical self
- developing new interests
- reducing social isolation and connecting with a new community
- connecting with a transformed sense of self.

This evaluation aimed to explore the extent to which these possibilities for reconnection are built into the systems and structures of the football group, and the extent to which they have been achieved.

#### Reclaiming a physical self

Although improved physical wellbeing was not spontaneously referred to as one of the benefits of the football group by the players, more detailed investigation of this issue revealed that most players experienced some physical health problems when they were referred to the football group, and these improved over the period they were involved in the group. In addition to this improvement in physical health, players also described developing confidence in their bodies, and a positive perception of what their bodies were capable of. Some said that through the football group they had been able to develop a more positive connection with their bodies even outside the group, and made efforts to stay fit and to eat healthily. There is evidence, therefore, that participation in the football group contributes towards reclaiming a physical self – an important element of the recovery process.

#### Developing new interests

For many of the players, football was a part

of their lives before displacement, so it was more a matter of reconnecting with a previous interest rather than developing a new one. However, one of the consequences of torture, and of displacement to a country which is often experienced as hostile, is often a loss of interest in activities which were previously enjoyed. According to van der Kolk (2014), people who are traumatised are unable to experience pleasure in day-to-day activities, so just re-engaging with an activity and enjoying it is an achievement which can have a considerable impact on recovery.

A clear theme running through players' descriptions of their involvement with the football group, and of observations of the football group sessions, was the enjoyment they got from the activity. This is described in more detail in Section E, but for many players the football sessions were the only time during the week when they would laugh and be released from the painful thoughts which consumed them for the rest of the time. Whilst engaging in an enjoyable activity for a few hours a week may seem like a small part of an overwhelmingly difficult existence, there is evidence that this can actually be an important element in the recovery of those involved in the football group (van der Kolk, 2014).

#### Reducing social isolation and connecting with a new community

The centrality of social support and social connectedness in wellbeing and recovery from distressing experiences has already been described (see Section F). There was a strong consensus amongst the players involved in this evaluation that finding a group of friends was one of the greatest benefits of their involvement in the football group (discussed in Section E).

There are characteristics of the football group (see Section G) which make it possible for almost all the FFT clients who engage with it to connect with others in non-threatening ways, and which enable them to build relationships over time. Once this has been achieved, it is possible for



players to start to connect with people outside the football group, sometimes through other AitC projects and sometimes externally (e.g. attending college; participation in a Sunday football league). This is an element of the football group which is likely to have a very significant impact on the recovery of those involved.

### *Connecting with a transformed sense of self*

The ways in which players described their connection with AitC, and the opportunities associated with that, indicate that this relationship is important in players beginning to see themselves as something more than a survivor of torture. They start to see themselves as belonging to an organisation which is recognised and respected, and through the way they are accepted by Arsenal, and given opportunities to attend special events (e.g. matches), they begin to perceive themselves as valued. They also gain access to other AitC projects which help them to develop new skills and can potentially lead to opportunities for employment, and further integration into their new society.

Whilst players value their relationship with FFT, and greatly appreciate the support they continue to receive from the organisation, it is their new relationship with Arsenal which contributes to the development of a transformed sense of self. The partnership between the two organisations, therefore, plays a key role in the recovery process for those involved in the football group.

One of the great strengths of the FFT/ AITC partnership is that clients continue to work with FFT clinicians as they engage with the football group, so as they begin to reconnect with others and with their own bodies, they can continue to explore with their clinician issues relating to earlier phases which emerge through this process. The partnership is central to this process – neither organisation would be in a position to facilitate the recovery process without the involvement of the other.

### **Recommendations for future developments for the Football Group and the partnership between Arsenal in the Community and Freedom from Torture.**

As already outlined, there are many characteristics of the football group, and the partnership between AitC and FFT, which contribute to the recovery of players who engage with it. The first set of recommendations, therefore, relate to ensuring that certain elements of the programme are maintained.

It is recommended that AitC and FFT continue to:

- Use a joint working approach with FFT clinicians supporting both players and the AitC staff.
- Maintain the therapeutic focus of the group, prioritising respect and participation and the establishment of a safe space in which players of all fitness levels and abilities can feel comfortable.
- Include non-threatening communication activities in warm-ups.
- Maintain the same coaching staff as are currently involved with the group. If it becomes necessary to involve new staff, ensure they have the key personal qualities (e.g. calm, compassionate, excellent interpersonal skills) as well as the technical skills and experience to work with this client group.
- Only invite FFT clients to join the group, since the fact that players have similar experiences is a crucial element in the success of the group.
- Maintain consistency within sessions. The fact that sessions follow broadly the same format each week means that players can predict what will happen, which creates a feeling of security.
- Continue to use the football group as a foundation so that players can move onto other things, both within AitC and outside.

Through involvement in the football group, players can build confidence, develop relationships and energy, and an interest in doing more. For those who have their right to remain there are the employability courses, but even before that there may be activities some players could be connected to (e.g. Sunday league teams).

There are also areas which could be developed further, and the second set of recommendations relate to issues which could be considered for the future.

### **Provide additional support when FFT clients are first referred to the football group.**

When FFT clients are first referred to the football group, they need some additional support to enable them to attend their first session. Currently, one of the AitC coaches goes to meet the client who has been referred in the FFT centre, along with their clinician, to explain more about the group and so that the client knows they will see somebody they recognise when they go along. This is very useful and should be continued. The first step can be difficult even for those who enjoy football and are reasonably fit:

*‘You know, the difficulty is the first time. Because you don’t know how they will receive you, you don’t know how other members’ attitude will be towards yourself. So you’re, can I go, can I not go, I’m not sure. How will they think, how will they receive me, how will they perceive me? You don’t know which type of football they are doing there - am I good enough? All those questions come to your mind’ (Player).*

It may be worth considering whether FFT clients could be accompanied from the FFT centre to the Hub for their first session, either by the FFT clinician attached to the football group, or by a client who already attends the group.

### **FFT uses the findings of this evaluation to raise awareness amongst FFT clinicians of the ways in which the football group assists in recovery.**

It may be that clinicians do not have a good understanding of the range of outcomes which can be achieved through clients’ involvement in the football group, and/ or understand that the football group is suitable for clients with a wide range of physical abilities. If this is the case, then clients who may benefit from the group are not being referred. It would be useful to share some of the findings of this evaluation in an accessible format with FFT clinicians.

### **Establish a clear policy on the length of clients’ involvement with the football group.**

Currently, FFT clients are able to participate in the football group for as long as they want to, even after their individual therapy with FFT has ended. There are advantages to this. It ensures that the group remains relatively stable in terms of membership, which contributes to it being a safe space in which players can start to become more confident, develop relationships and learn to manage emotions. A high turnover of players would have a very negative impact on the effectiveness of the group in contributing to the recovery of the FFT clients involved.

However, if more clients were referred to the group, it would be difficult to maintain this practice informally. It would be helpful for AitC and FFT to discuss and agree a policy on this now, rather than if/ when the group becomes too large to manage. No recommendation is made here about what the policy should be. The AitC staff will have an understanding of the largest number of players who can be effectively managed in a group such as this; and the FFT staff will have a good understanding of how ending members’ involvement with the group could best be managed, should the numbers increase above the level decided. Although this is a difficult policy to establish, the skills and experience exist within the staff associated with the group to do so.



**Consider the feasibility of offering activities which female FFT clients would feel more comfortable joining.**

The benefits for FFT clients of physical activity, and the connection with AitC, have been established through this evaluation. Whilst the football group is theoretically open to both men and women, in practice women do not join; yet women are likely to benefit in the same ways as men from engagement in a sporting or physical activity offered by FFT and AitC.

In order to identify the most appropriate activity for female FFT clients, it would be necessary to have discussions with this client group. However, with other groups of female survivors of traumatic events, there is evidence that any activity which involves some kind of rhythmic movement is helpful (van der Kolk, 2014), which might include dance or activities such as zumba. Yoga has been found to be very helpful but sessions would need to be offered by a specialist because the movements can trigger feelings of vulnerability (van der Kolk, 2014).

Develop and implement a simple monitoring and evaluation strategy, with clear expected outcomes and with baseline data collected when new players join the football group.

In order to demonstrate more effectively the impact of the football group on the wellbeing of players, and to identify ways in which the project could be improved, it would be helpful to develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation strategy. It is important that it is simple, so as not to become burdensome for either players or staff.

It could be based on the elements of the 'reconnection' phase which have most relevance for the football group, combined with the benefits of the group outlined in the 'programme model'. A potential organising structure is outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2. Potential structure for monitoring and evaluation strategy**

Overall objective: The football group will contribute to the recovery of survivors of torture

| Outcomes <sup>24</sup>                                 | Indicators  |
|--|---|
| Reclaim a physical self                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved physical health</li> <li>More positive perceptions of their bodies</li> <li>Taking action to stay healthy outside football sessions (e.g. food choices; other forms of exercise)</li> </ul> |
| Develop new interests                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enjoyment of the football sessions</li> </ul>  |
| Reduce social isolation / connect with a new community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased connection with others in the football group</li> <li>Increased connection with people outside the football group (through AITC projects or outside).</li> </ul>                           |
| Connect with a transformed sense of self               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sense of belonging to AitC</li> <li>Feelings of self-worth (feeling valued &amp; special)</li> <li>Increased confidence to try new activities</li> </ul>   |

The strategy would need to be discussed and revised by the AITC/ FFT team involved with the football group, and, once agreed, information-gathering systems and tools would need to be developed. It would be particularly helpful if some information could be collected from FFT clients when they first join the group, in order to provide a baseline from which change can be measured.

**Explore ways in which the football group may contribute to the 'safety/ stabilisation' and 'trauma processing' phases of recovery, as well as the 'reconnection' phase.**

Through this evaluation, the ways in which participation in the football group contributes to the 'reconnection' phase of the recovery process have been clear. It is likely that participation also contributes to the 'safety' or 'stabilisation' phase, and the 'trauma processing' phase, but these elements did not come through as clearly during the evaluation. It would be worth continuing to explore the ways in which this might work through future research or evaluations, to deepen the understanding of how the football group contributes to recovery.

<sup>24</sup> Based on elements of 'reconnection' phase of recovery process outlined by Lamb (2017). The suggested outcomes/ indicators do not include anger management, because this does not relate directly to the 'reconnection' phase of the recovery process. However, this could be added as a separate outcome.





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## Annexes

1. Code of Conduct
2. Bleep test
3. Development of Programme Model
4. Data collection methods
5. Background of evaluator







Freedom from Torture



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