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Press release

For immediate release

Football Makes Our Shared History receives Lottery boost

ORGANISERS of a unique sports heritage initiative have brought together Northern Ireland's Football Association, Gaelic Athletic Association, Ulster Rugby, Ulster Hockey, Peace Players and many more children's sports to celebrate shared history.

The National Children's Football Alliance (NCFA) has been awarded a £67,500 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund towards its Football Makes Our Shared History project, which will culminate in an exhibition of children's research on how sports contribute to our shared history and the creation of peace pitches by twinning designated areas of play with Flanders Peace Field in Belgium, site of the First World War Christmas Truces in 1914.

Thanks to the National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, people of all ages across Northern Ireland, including schoolchildren, will research the impact of sport on local communities and how it has helped to shape a contemporary society.

Football Makes Our Shared Heritage will be launched at Queen's University, Belfast on Thursday, February 17.

Karl Oakes, head of sport at Queen's, said: "We're delighted that funding has been made available to enable people in Northern Ireland to learn more about how about sport has contributed to their shared history.

"Over the last 50 years across our indoor and outdoor facilities and through sport development programmes, we've seen that sport is a fantastic way of bringing students from different backgrounds together. Our current students have a choice of more than 50 sports clubs to join with participation and performance sporting opportunities.

"If we needed a reminder of the benefits that sport gives us in terms of health and wellbeing, social interaction and uniting communities, the pandemic has certainly given us that."

Olive Hill, NI Committee Member, The National Lottery Heritage Fund said:

“Thanks to National Lottery players more than £30 million raised each week goes to good causes across the UK. This project gives participants the opportunity to not only learn about their sporting heritage, but to become truly involved in it by exploring sport in an inclusive and engaging way. We know that giving people a chance to have a closer understanding and relationship to their heritage reaps many benefits, and is something we are proud to fund.”

All research and oral histories collated during the project will be included on the National Children’s Football Alliance website: <http://www.childrensfootballalliance.com/football-and-peace/> and a short documentary film will be screened at Queen’s University, Belfast later this year.

National Children’s Football Alliance, projects director, Paul Cooper added: “Football Makes Our Shared History is the essence of play. We are delighted that that we’ve received this support thanks to National Lottery players and that Northern Ireland’s great sporting associations value community games of all disciplines. We look forward to seeing the children’s work and how they connect to their games with grandparents, relatives and friends. This is about the historic nature of play and how it continues to shape our landscape.”

Chris Wright, Irish FA Foundation community relations officer, said: “Our work is centred around Football for All and we are pleased to support such an inclusive project as this one.”

Brian McAvoy, CEO of Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association, said: “We place a great emphasis on outreach and using sport to bring people together from different social, religious and ethnic backgrounds. We look forward to supporting this project.”

Chris Webster, Ulster Rugby’s head of rugby development, said: “We look forward to celebrating how rugby brings us together.”

Tim Wareing, Director & Head Coach, TW Sports / TW Braga, said: “Our boys and girls are looking forward to participating in Football Makes Our Shared History at Ulster University, Coleraine”

The sports heritage project will leave a legacy in each of the six counties. One of the project’s aims is to have a peace pitch in each county twinned with Flanders Peace Field.

On April 24, 2018, the first peace pitch in Northern Ireland was unveiled. The George Best Peace Pitch is located on Cregagh Green, Belfast, where Best fell in love with the game. There are also peace pitches at: Enniskillen Royal Grammar School, (rugby pitch), Ashfield Girls School, Belfast (netball pitch) and North Coast Integrated College, Coleraine,(football pitch).

Schools, clubs, groups and teams are invited to take part in Football Makes Our Shared History. To find out more, please visit www.childrensfootballalliance.com

Notes to editors

For more details, contact Ernie Brennan on 07813 082584 or email erniebrennan@thecfa.co.uk
Alternatively, call Paul Cooper on 07875 283093 or email paulcooper@thecfa.co.uk

The National Children's Football Alliance was established in 2008 to enhance children's development through play. The NCFEA seek to protect childhood through play.

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Using money raised by The National Lottery, The National Lottery Heritage Fund inspires, leads and resources the UK's heritage to create positive and lasting change for people and communities, now and in the future. www.HeritageFund.org.uk.

Follow @HeritageFundNI on Twitter and @HeritageFundNorthernIreland on Facebook and use the hashtag #NationalLotteryHeritageFund

Since The National Lottery began in 1994, National Lottery players have raised over £43 billion for projects and more than 635,000 grants have been awarded across the UK.