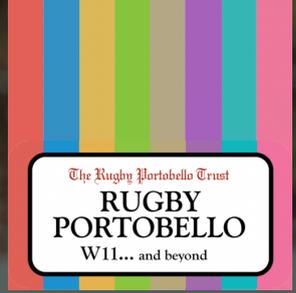


# FOOTBALL ACADEMY



REPORT BY  
THE RUGBY PORTOBELLO TRUST

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SUPPORTING THE CHILDREN AND  
YOUNG PEOPLE OF NORTH KENSINGTON

# About Us

The Rugby Portobello Trust (RPT) has been supporting the North Kensington community since 1884. **We support some of the most vulnerable children and young people in our community** through academic support, sports, art, music, employment support, mental health support, wellbeing support, skill-building and off-site trips. We also support local mums to build strong, healthy relationships with their children aged 0-5, thereby supporting the youngest members of our community.

The RPT is primarily funded through fundraising events and small grants and uses a network of nearly 200 volunteers to keep our running costs as low as possible. We are nearly 80% funded by donations, small grants and fundraising events. **In the last 12 months we supported more than 1,300 children, young people and mums.**



# Football Academy: Overview

The Rugby Portobello Trust's Football Academy (RPT FC) supports more than 110 local children to engage in high-quality sport throughout the year. We currently work with children aged 4 to 15, giving many of them their first taste of organised sport and teamwork and laying the foundation for a lifetime of wellbeing practices and sense of community.

Our academy supports children aged 4 (Under-5s or U5) to those who will reach the age of 15 by the end of the season (Under-15s or U15), so most of our players will be supported by our programme for more than 10 years. Whilst still very much a grassroots club, RPT FC is respected across London. More than 20 of our players have trained with or been signed to professional clubs, giving local children a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to pursue their dreams.

The RPT's Football Academy runs 36 weeks of the year, 7 days per week, on site at our North Kensington centre and off-site using hired pitches and halls. Each player has two training sessions per week (1-2 hours per session) plus one competitive match each Saturday, with U14s also taking part in matches with Wembley FC on Sundays. In addition to this, our players take part in summer tournaments and some take part in residential and international tours.

Players cover 26% of the running costs of the programme, which include equipment, uniforms, annual tours, end-of-season awards, league registration, insurance, team transportation, pitch hire, programme development—including coach training and qualifications—and staff salaries. The rest is funded through generous local supporters, businesses and RPT fundraising events. Ten of our players are on 100% bursaries, ensuring we're inclusive of every child in our community, regardless of their economic position.



# Response to Lockdown

When the first lockdown was announced in March 2020, our programme quickly came to a halt. Parents were feeling stressed and anxious, particularly in response to the closure of schools and the subsequent closure of pitches and playgrounds. With little clarity about how long Football Academy would be closed down, we decided to address some of these concerns.

Within two weeks of the first lockdown we were **hosting online quizzes every two weeks**, which were run by our coaches via Zoom and challenged our players on their knowledge of all things football. This was a great way to **keep the kids engaged, keep their enthusiasm up and keep them connected with each other**.

We also started sharing **twice-weekly fitness plans and videos** with parents, which they were able to use to help their children keep up their training and fitness. Each activity required no more than a football and a little space, and some even less than that, being designed to take place in small spaces to remain inclusive of all of our players and their living conditions and taking into consideration the government restrictions on outdoor time.

Once restrictions were lifted, we quickly resumed training outdoors (our indoor Reception/Year 1 service had further restrictions), but were in and out of service due to subsequent restrictions over the following 18 months. Recurring lockdowns left many partner organisations unable to plan their usual summer tournaments in which RPT FC takes part, meaning 2022 will welcome our first summer tournament in three years.



# Current Challenges

**Post lockdown, more than 90% of our players returned.** Some of those whom we lost were actively recruited by other clubs, and some reached an age where they were best served by organisations supporting older players. Despite now being fully re-opened, the impact of the pandemic is ongoing. Some weekends we struggle to put together full teams to compete in the Regents Park Youth League matches due to players testing positive for COVID-19.

**The biggest challenge we've faced with those who returned is re-establishing their physical fitness and mental approach to physical activity.** Some players returned noticeably overweight with a decreased level of physical ability, stamina and enthusiasm. It is clear that this is a result of prolonged reduction in activities for children due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected both their physical fitness as well as their mental health.

**Another challenge that we consistently face, pre- and post-pandemic, is managing parents' expectations.** We have a reputation for being a talented, well-managed club that perform well in tournaments, and while it's not uncommon for our players to be given trials at clubs such as Chelsea FC, Tottenham Hotspurs FC, Liverpool FC, Arsenal FC and others, that is not our core aim. The potential opportunities for a young player who gets picked up by a professional club can be life-changing, but the likelihood of this happening (and of a young player actually staying signed and going on to play as a career) are so slim that we need to manage expectations and remind parents why we're here: we're a local club supporting local children. We do however continue to support players who show this level of potential, because this exposure allows them to benefit from the experience and resources of a professional club, and if they don't get selected to continue with a professional club, they will return to us much improved as young footballers, helping the development of the rest of our players.

**Another challenge that we have always faced is local space to train.** Outdoor pitches in the local area are incredibly limited and at full capacity, so expanding either our teams or our training sessions remains difficult. Whilst we have use of the indoors space at The RPT, this space is only suitable for our youngest Reception/Year 1 players.



# Future Developments

- We are working to recruit **one more coach** within the next 4 months.
- We are planning to add to our FA coach-training with a **UEFA coach qualification** for all coaches.
- We are expecting to achieve **Charter Standard status** (Middlesex FA quality standard) by the end of 2022 – this was delayed by nearly two years due to complications from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In May 2022 we'll be taking **62 of our players on their first residential in more than two years**. Whilst we hope to resume domestic and international touring later this year (our first international tours were to The Netherlands in 2018 and France in 2019), this residential is purely activity-based to help rebuild our team spirit and enthusiasm.
- We planned to develop the Academy into a full U5 to U16 academy but have taken the last two years to review our position. The lack of playing space locally has been an ongoing hindrance to our growth, and we see that our strengths and networks lie in building a strong foundation for our younger teams, so we will continue to focus on developing our players at the youngest stage and will therefore have U15s as our oldest team, as this is the oldest group allowed to participate in the Regents Park Youth League matches. We are working on a partnership with Dunstable Town FC to take on our players when they move to U16.



# Professional Clubs

- 1 player from our U13 team has been signed to Westham FC with potential to sign with Liverpool FC on full scholarship.
- 4 of our U14 players are currently on trial at Luton Town FC.
- Up to 30 U7 to U14 players train once a week with scouts from Liverpool FC and Luton Town FC, which gives them an optional third training session each week, as well as an opportunity to experience training with a professional scout.



# Feedback

In 2021 we asked our players and parents for feedback on our Football Academy, specifically to track progress on three outcomes: developing new skills, improving wellbeing and building positive relationships. 36 children and 45 parents took part in the surveys.

## Improved wellbeing:

- 100% of children and 100% of parents said the child's fitness had improved as a result of attending Football Academy.
- 97% of children said they looked forward to attending Football Academy and had fun while there.
- 89% of parents said their child's mental health and 91% of parents said their child's emotional health had definitely improved as a result of attending Football Academy.
- 89% of children said Football Academy helps them feel confident about themselves.

## Building positive relationships:

- 100% of children said they have good friends at Football Academy.
- 98% of parents said their child made friends and built positive relationships through Football Academy.

## Developing new skills

- 94% of children and 96% of parents said their child had learned new skills at Football Academy.



# Parent Briefing

At the start of each new season, we meet with parents, old and new, to brief them on the ethos of our club and set out our expectations of them and their children, which in turn helps to manage their expectations of us. Some of what we cover includes:

## **Our aims:**

1. To make your child the best possible footballer that they can be.
2. To build confidence, resilience, hard work ethic, competitiveness, team spirit, and a love of sport.
3. Encourage your child to lead a healthy lifestyle now and in the future
4. Support your child to build strong friendships and be proud to represent RPT FC and their community.

## **The 4-corner model:**

The FA (football association) re-developed their coaching system for young players using the 4-corner model. All our coaches use this system in their planning. Ball mastery and 1-on-1 activities are the two main principles that we teach. We also prioritise individual development over results, with players developing in different positions.

## **The challenge for all players at training is to:**

1. Listen to the coaches
2. Work hard to improve (improve fitness and general all-round play)
3. Attendance: low attendance = low ability
4. Always try your best at training and matches

## **The challenge for all players in matches is to:**

1. Work hard
2. Put into matches what you've learned in training
3. Respect your teammates, coaches, referee and opponents

## **Professional clubs**

RPT FC works with professional clubs and has very long-standing association with many due to a small number of our players who have signed/trialed over the last 10 years. However, it's not a priority to churn out players for professional clubs. Our priority is to develop local players who are proud to represent RPT FC and their community, have good values and morals and have a strong sense of team spirit and strong friendships.

# Case Study

In the spring of 2021, Alvy, one of our U12 players, was signed to West Ham FC Academy. Alvy had been with RPT FC since he was 5 years old. His natural skill alone wouldn't have led him to sign with a professional club, but mixed with his exceptional listening skills and work ethic, he was able to realise his dream.

Despite playing well above his U12 level, Alvy is a humble, dedicated player. He listened to his coaches, learned from his teammates and learned from his mistakes and his opponents.

Alvy has innate talent but has had to work exceptionally hard over the last 7 years to be given the opportunity he now has. Our RPT FC coaches were able to recognise that talent early on and have supported Alvy through many training sessions – rainy evenings on the pitch, cold afternoons training, challenging and guiding him to help him reach where he now is.

We wish Alvy the very best of luck at West Ham FC Academy.



# Quick Facts

- Currently 110 children aged 4 to 15 (Reception/Year 1 to U15) take part in regular training sessions
- RPT FC is run by 9 coaches and 1 manager—all of whom have a minimum of an FA-Level 1 qualification—and supported by 6 volunteers from St Paul's School, Queen's Gate School, Latymer Upper School and Loughborough University.
- Our Football Academy launched in its current form 10 years ago. Previous to that, we had one team of players who grew from a U6 to U16 team before we expanded to a full academy.
- Since its inception, our formal Football Academy has supported more than 330 local children.
- Between January and December 2021 we delivered 212 football sessions to 122 children throughout term-time and holiday periods. This equated to 9,400 service visits and more than 17,625 hours of support.
- Between January 2021 and December 2021, RPT FC took part in more than 400 competitive football matches.
- In October 2021, 20 players took part in a day-trip to Ashmansworth, Berkshire for a day filled with team-building activities and football, including a friendly match against the local village team



# Annual Running Costs

EXPENDITURE	VALUE
Staffing	£44,797
Pitch Hire	£15,000
Back office support (Admin, HR, IT, Finance, Comms)	£11,031
Residential	£6,260
Professional Fees	£3,902
Transportation	£682
IT	£615
Awards	£500
Uniforms	£500
Coach Training	£248
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>£83,535</b>

