

Foot Care United

Salford Podiatry student, Jay Wasilewski, won the Cosyfeet Podiatry Award 2014 and used her £1000 award to set up the Foot Care United initiative. The initiative sets out to provide free training on basic foot health to family, friends, volunteers and professionals involved in care for the elderly. In this way, help can be provided for those who are no longer able to care for their own feet, and serious foot health problems can be identified, treated and avoided where possible.

Jay, a mature student who works for Age UK as Foot Care Co-ordinator for Chorley, West Lancashire and Sefton, reports here on the progress of the Foot Care United project.

For most people foot care is part of a regular grooming routine and is completed as instinctively as washing your face, however the consequences of not being able to maintain this basic need can, for some, be catastrophic. Although this problem is not exclusive to people over 65, this age group is most affected, possibly due to the rate of disability and immobility increasing with age (1). With over 10 million people in the UK being over 65 and the forecast set to rise dramatically by 2050 (2) innovations for extra support are needed.

Falls relating to neglected foot care are well evidenced, and what are sometimes thought to be minor problems of the foot, such as long nails, corns, athlete foot, etc., can, if unnoticed/untreated, lead to secondary complications such as bacterial infections and hospitalisation. This is of great concern bearing in mind recent research which documents significant levels of undiagnosed diabetes in the over 65 population.

The concept of Foot Care United was established to help sustain the regular grooming of the feet by whatever means is available to the individual person/fan (see fig 1 for configuration of project). The idea is to utilise skills, educate and unite family, friends, neighbours, carers and professionals into a foot care partnership to assist those in need. On occasion, the carer/supporter can also be the cared for/fan: it can sometimes be possible to care for someone else's feet while impossible to reach down to care for your own.

The idea of extending foot care from beyond the family structure is to acknowledge that family sizes are decreasing as we head towards the next century (2), and to realise that one's supportive community network could increase if motivated and unified. Foot Care United is an investment in people, by people, to promote the wellbeing of individuals by taking preventative measures to sustain active mobility. One essential facet of this project is to recognise that some fans can become supporters, and could go on to become coaches to take this project forward.

During the initial Foot Care United workshops it was apparent that although some older people had lots of family, friends etc., to potentially help with their foot care, very few had ever seen their feet. Various explanations were offered and it was clear that the will to help and to seek help was prevalent, but there was not the structure for doing so in place. The workshops provide basic advice about foot care to give people the confidence to actively offer help and participate. Suggestions for the development of the project were also encouraging, including the creation of opportunities to book individual sessions between supporters and fans.

The following is just one account of how Foot Care United enhanced a family's life.

Supporters Workshop

Mrs X attended one of the workshops with the intention of helping her mother who, since her recent hip replacement, was struggling. During the session, however, a number of red flags emerged in relation to her father. Mrs X had just purchased some slippers for her father, a size bigger than usual at his request (1ST red flag), which he never seems to take off (2nd red flag). This also prompted memories of how her father loved to wear highly polished shoes when he went out walking, neither of which had she seen for a while (3rd red flag). Mrs X also remembers commenting to him that he seemed a bit wobbly (4th red flag) but he just put it down to age, and because he is so self-sufficient, she never gave it another thought until the workshop.

Mrs X likened the workshop to completing a jigsaw, in that each piece of information received was plausible and in isolation unrelated, however awareness activated linkage to portray a very different picture. The removal of her father's socks confirmed that even though she had perceived that he was managing ok, he really wasn't, and despite their close relationship he had felt embarrassed to mention anything. See fig 2, 3 & 4 for visual documentation.

Mrs X followed the guidelines of the workshop and engaged a professional to cut her dad's nails. She also arranged an appointment for him to see his GP, who he hadn't seen for at least 10 years. This was the trigger for several tests, and Mrs X's dad is now taking medication for high blood pressure and is classed as having pre-diabetes. On a very positive note, he has now returned to walking daily and has no need for larger slippers. In appreciation of the project, Mrs X offered the pictures and her story to demonstrate how a cry for help is often silent and well disguised, and the clues so easily missed.

Conclusion

Mrs X's story is sadly not an isolated case, and adequately demonstrates that neglected foot care is not always down to neglect. Foot Care United aims to get feet noticed and to facilitate one-to-one foot care 'appointments' between fan and supporter, individualising a person centred foot care plan. The ethos of this project is united foot care between a fan, their supporters and professionals. It doesn't withdraw the need for a podiatrist/chiroprapist, but in some cases time between appointments can be extended with daily foot care. However, increased foot awareness would encourage more people to seek professional support when needed, with the aim of preventing serious problems and promoting better quality of life.

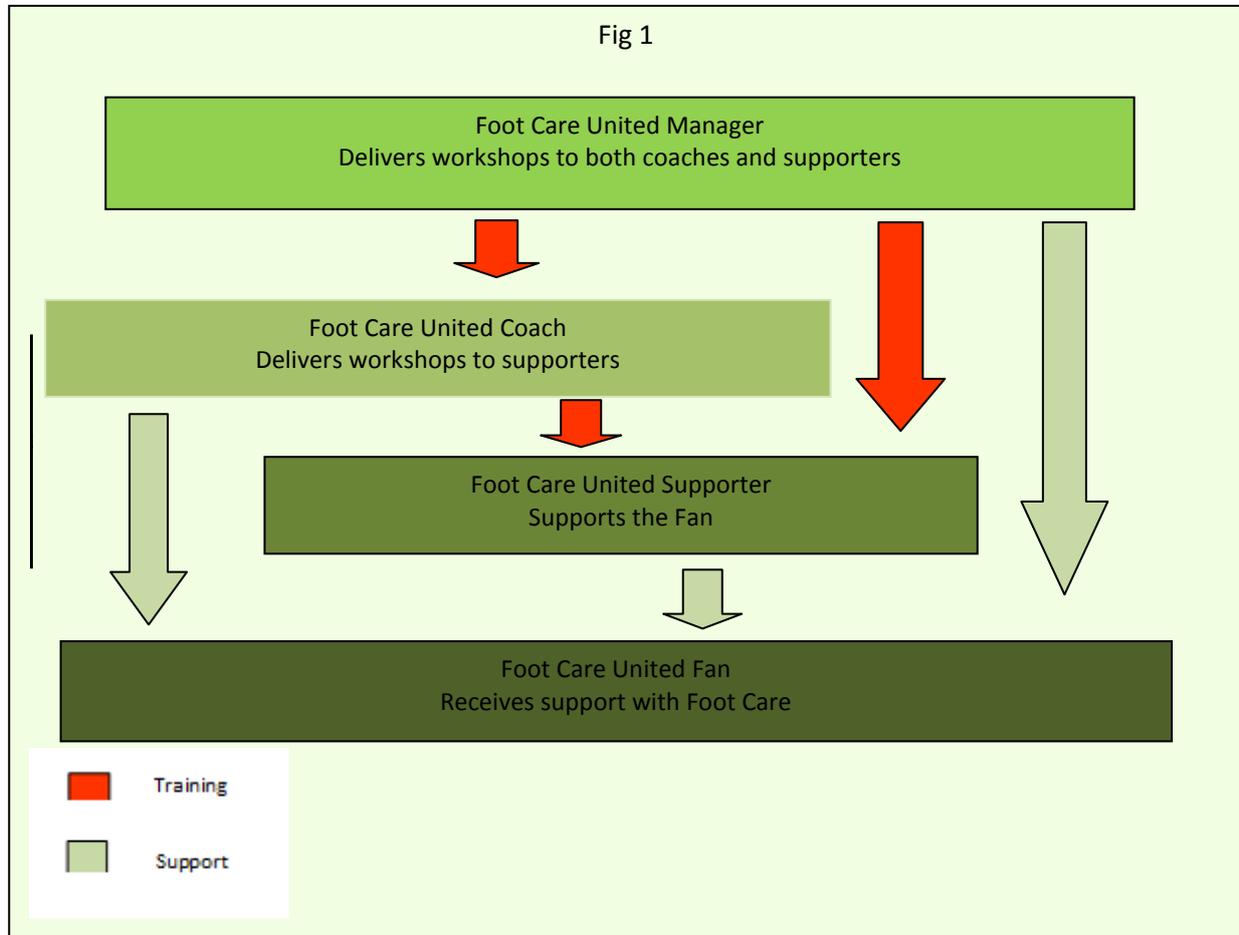
For more information and to download a Foot Care United leaflet go to www.footcareunited.com

If you would like to find out more about the Cosyfeet Podiatry Award go to www.cosyfeet.com/professionals

References

1. Age International, (2014) [www.ageinternational](http://www.ageinternational.org.uk/Documents/Age%20International%20Facing%20the%200facts%20report.pdf) , <http://www.ageinternational.org.uk/Documents/Age%20International%20Facing%20the%200facts%20report.pdf>

2. Parliament UK, (www.parliament.uk),
http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/key_issues/Key-Issues-The-ageing-population2007.pdf



Dad's nails were long, uneven with sharp edges due to limited agility. These nails had been recently cut by dad so are not a true indication of the real problem.

Fig 2



The nails on the 2nd & 4th digits of the left foot were curled over with marked indentation on the skin.

Fig 3



Dad's nails are at a manageable length and with daily foot care in addition to a weekly file are more comfortable.

Fig 4