Football possesses an enduring power as a force for social good. The game so often acts as a catalyst for improving people’s lives – and this attribute has seen a football club from Iceland earn itself the prized accolade of Best Grassroots Project as part of UEFA’s 2018 Grassroots Awards.

FC Sækó, based in the capital Reykjavik, plays a significant role in society in Iceland by helping to improve the mental and physical health of people by giving them the opportunity to meet others, play football and, most importantly, have fun in sharing the joy of this beautiful game.

FC Sækó was founded in 2011 as an independent sports club for men and women with mental health problems. This initiative involves cooperation between the Role Centre, Reykjavik’s welfare department and the mental health department of Iceland’s National University Hospital.

The work of this admirable club reflects the widely-held belief that physical activity can play a vital part in making a difference to people’s well-being. “I think that in recent years, there has been an awakening regarding the importance of exercise to mental health,” says Dagur Sveinn Dagbjartsson, grassroots manager at the Football Association of Iceland (KSÍ).

“I have no doubt myself, and research has also shown this, that football or any kind of exercise has a positive impact on people’s mental health and emotional stability.”

FC Sækó has played a crucial role in opening people’s everyday horizons and freeing them from loneliness. “It’s really about the fellowship,” says football coach and occupational therapist Andri Vilbergsson. “A group of people who come together to play football - this gets people out of their homes and breaks the isolation they often find themselves in.”

Bergϸór Grétar Böðversson, who works as a coach at FC Sækó, says the club feels immense pride at being able to give meaning to people’s lives through football.

“I can see that this club has a very positive impact on many people,” he reflects. “I have seen guys that are ill outside training and talk about their mental illness, but then I see them on the field playing like professionals. We make them captains – they learn a role and responsibility.”

The joy of football sits deep within Hannah Bryndís Proppé Bailey, who is eternally grateful to FC Sækó for giving her such invaluable help. “I think it’s terrific,” says Hannah, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia at the age of 20. “Because it is so important for people who suffer from mental illness like me to exercise and get out of the house – it’s just great!”

FC Sækó are deserving winners of the UEFA Best Project grassroots award, and Dagur Sveinn Dagbjartsson and Bergϸór Grétar Böðversson came to UEFA’s headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland to receive the prize from UEFA President Aleksander Čeferin.

“This club is playing an exemplary social role,” Mr Čeferin says, “in giving people a wonderful chance to improve their mental and physical health by sharing in the joy of football.”

“Grassroots football is crucial to the well-being of sport, and I want to ensure that UEFA continues to work closely with all our member associations, to enable everyone to have the opportunity to play and enjoy the sport which we love.”

**About the UEFA Grassroots Awards**

The UEFA Grassroots Awards have been run annually since 2010, and invite national associations from around Europe to put forward candidates in the following categories: Best Leader, Best Club and Best Project. The awards reward excellence in the grassroots field – seen by UEFA as crucial in helping to nurture football's overall good health.

The Best Project accolade aims in particular to reward projects which demonstrate innovation or social responsibility, which provide evidence of or which focus on growth or retention of players, and which support the UEFA Respect principles.