

In this third episode, we speak with Ellie-Mae Banks, 2021 Young Ambassador Award winner for Lions Clubs British Isles. Ellie-Mae discusses the Young Ambassador programme and what young people can gain from volunteering in their communities. We also hear from Cynthia Lines, who opens her beautiful garden in Leicestershire to the public to raise funds for local charities with the support of fellow Hinckley and Burbage Lions.

Be uplifted, be inspired. This is Step Forward and Volunteer.

Hello, everybody, welcome to the third episode of Step Forward and Volunteer, a brand-new podcast brought to you by Lions Clubs British Isles.

My name is Ben Mouncer and thank you so much for tuning in. It's a real pleasure to have you with us. Our aim is simple. We want to celebrate the positive difference volunteering makes to communities across the British Isles and beyond. To do that, we'll be speaking to those who give up their time to help others, inspiring more people to step forward and volunteer.

This month I'm speaking with Ellie-Mae Banks, the 2021 Young Ambassador award winner for Lions Clubs British Isles. The programme recognises and encourages those aged 15-18, who share Lions' values and make a real difference to others through their passion for a particular cause. Each year, hundreds of young people from across the British Isles enter the Young Ambassador bursary awards, details of which are promoted through schools, youth organisations, media coverage, and stories shared on social media.

We also hear from Cynthia Lines who opens her beautiful garden in Leicestershire to the public to raise funds for local charities with the support of fellow Hinckley and Burbage Lions.

But first, I have a favour to ask. Because this is a new podcast, we want your help in getting the word out there. Tell your family, tell your friends - and if you're a Lions member, why not let other members of your club know about the podcast - and how easy it is to listen. All you need to do is either go on the website www.lionsclubs.co where you will see a link to

the podcast, or you can search for Step Forward and Volunteer on apps like Spotify, Podbean, Apple Podcasts and Google Podcasts.

You can listen on-demand or subscribe so that you never miss an episode. We publish a new programme on the second Wednesday of each month, and we're really keen to spread the positivity and get as many people listening as we can.

Now it's time to introduce our first guest, Ellie-Mae Banks - an inspiring young woman who became the 2021 Young Ambassador, with the backing of East Anglia New Century Lions. In our conversation, Ellie-Mae talks about why she joined St John Ambulance, her experience representing Lions Clubs British Isles in the European finals, and what young people gain through volunteering in their local communities.

Ellie-Mae, thank you so much for joining us on Step forward and Volunteer. I understand your Young Ambassador project that Lions are supporting began with your involvement with St. John's Ambulance, maybe tell the listener a bit about that.

So, I joined St John Ambulance when I was 15, I was quite late into joining compared to a lot of people because you can join when you're like five now.

I was doing my Duke of Edinburgh Award at school, and I needed a skill section. And I was like, oh, you know, first aid is an alright skill to now - might use it at some point, it's good to have, I guess. So, I joined, and I had full intention of leaving very quickly. And I didn't, I ended up staying really enjoying it and progressed. You know, I've been there for three years now. But I went from Corporal to Sergeant to Lead Cadet and then District Cadet of the Year. Now an adult in St John helping cadets. And that main intention of leaving after a few weeks just never happened.

What do you think, drew you into it? Why do you think you found it so enjoyable and fulfilling, I guess?

Well, I think I went in with the intention of not, of thinking it's first aid, and that's about it. And I kind of realised very quickly, it's not just first aid. I think it was in my first week, I'd already started learning sign language. And I met so many people, and it's just so great.

Brilliant. Now I know that part of your work with them is a project around educating young people on knife crime. Maybe talk a little bit about that. Why did you choose that as a project?

So back in 2018, a lot of there was a lot of stabbings going on. And when I went on a cadet leadership course with St John, we were taught about a thing called heli-view, which is kind of where you're in the situation - and at the time there was, I wanted to do something, I didn't know what because so much was going on for knife crime. So, I kind of put my heli-view hat on and I just took a step back, I just gave myself a minute to be like, okay, what needs to be done? Isn't that what isn't going on right now. And you know, we had knife amnesty bins, we had organisations saying put the knife down, we had people, because a lot of it is to do with county lines and drugs and stuff. And it's not the only thing in it, but it's a big part of it. And so, there was a lot of initiatives for that side. But there is nothing to do with if there is a knife crime injury, how do you treat that we rely on paramedics, but I think this could be wrong, but I think it takes around an average of eight minutes for an ambulance to get to you. If someone's bleeding out or someone's going into shock. That's an incredibly long time for them to be losing blood or in shock. So, I set up two hours, a one-hour session on a Friday night. And I got in the Be Lucky Anti-Crime Foundation to come in and talk to the cadets about the laws behind carrying a knife and things like that. So, I kind of linked in with some local organisations anyway. And then the week after, we'd done a load of knife crime related first aid and it went really well.

We're gonna talk about Ellie Mae about Lions, obviously and how you're, you know, as a Lions member, and we could talk a little bit about that. But last year, you were recognized as the Lions Clubs Young Ambassador Award Winner nationally, I believe.

Yeah, yeah.

Thank you. Congratulations.

Oh, it's so exciting.

So how did it how did it progress from there?

So, Sue Hibbert is the lady I was in contact with and her husband, Chris, and we'd talk about Lions and about my project, and we'd talk about public speaking and all this stuff that was related to Young Ambassador. But I was doing my A levels as well, at the time, I was volunteering with St. John, in the pandemic. I was also District Cadet Officer of the year and I had quite a lot going on when it was all going on. And they would call and talk about Lions Young Ambassador, but they'd also be like, so how are you? How's your A levels going? And, you know, and I think that's the support that really probably got me through it.

Excellent, and I guess Ellie Mae going through the Young Ambassador programme as well, you've seen other stories of young people serving their community, similar stories to yours, how inspiring has that been to have a window into some of the work amazing work that's being done around the whole British Isles through Lions Clubs.

It's amazing like, so my year was obviously quite unique to years before. So, we had dinner on Zoom together on the Friday night. Then on the Saturday we did the competition, and we all kind of got to talk about and we all got each other's Snapchats. And we were all messaging and stuff. And you're there and you don't know these people that you've never met, you're from complete different parts of the country. But you're sat there, you're listening to their presentations after everyone's done their presentation, like in private. And you're like you are amazing that you're so proud of these people, and you've never met them before. They're just absolutely incredible. And you have like complete adoration for them. And it's just really inspiring, because none of us were doing anything similar. And you're like, wow, this is actually something that goes on here as well. And I just never thought about it. And yeah, and the same happened in Greece. I'm sat down, I'm talking to them and I'm like, you're amazing, like, wow.

What happened in Greece then?

Oh, so it was actually a really like, I thought I was gonna go to university in September. So, it was really like, I'm not going to go and we're not going to be able to go and then luckily, I was able to go. And then we flew out, and yeah, it was amazing. And I met some incredible people. But it wasn't just the British Isles anymore, it was all across Europe. So, it was like, very overwhelming. I was okay with my speech because I've been doing it online. For the last previous two rounds. This one was in person, and in my head, I just hadn't comprehended that until I got there. I was like, oh, no. But it was fine, it went well, I really enjoyed it. I'm you know, I went out for dinner a couple of nights with two of the other young ambassadors and that was great, and we're all still friends. I've now got friends in Italy and Germany and the USA and all these different places, and it's just amazing.

Yeah, I guess that's been pretty inspirational for you as well. Ellie Mae. What do you think it is that has kind of led you to do the stuff that you've done over the last few years and try and give youth, a positive voice? Why do you think you're so passionate about that? Where does that come from?

Well, the volunteering side, I've always kind of grown up being surrounded by people doing amazing things like my dad and me always have kind of done these midnight walks every year since I was nine for St Elizabeth hospice, they looked after my granddad when he had lung cancer. So, we do every year, and we haven't missed one yet. So, I really enjoy that, we dress up and have fun. And I'm probably one of the younger ones, I started there as well. And I was telling all my friends, and then I got some friends to do it as well. And it was great. And the same with me and my dad have always done East Anglian Children's hospice fundraisers, and for my 16th birthday I did a skydive which was very scary, but great at the same time. And then being District Cadet of the year for St. John, I got to Chair the Youth Forum, which I also got to sit on the East Region, Chaired the District, and then sat on the East Region. And I think we're at a point in the pandemic where we weren't expecting it to happen, we were expecting a very normal 2020 and 2021, it didn't happen. And there were a point where young people couldn't be present in the organisation, because of the pandemic. so, we were making sure our voices were being heard, even though we couldn't

be present in the organisation at the time. So, I think from there, it kind of stemmed like, oh, youth voice is really important, because we got so much to change that it was that in itself, the fact that we've done some things that are inspiring to just let's keep going.

Yeah, amazing stuff. Now, you know, considering all of that, and everything that you've done, and your membership of the Lions, and seeing what Lions Clubs can ultimately help people with and seeing the difference that can make what would you say to other young people who you know, in, which might encourage them to take similar steps to what you've done? How would you encourage them to get involved with volunteering?

Oh, I mean, I can't see a bad part coming from it here. I mean, just do it. I think the main point is finding something you're passionate about and going with it. There's always going to be something that needs to be done in the area that you're interested in. Like, for example, I've always been passionate about the environment never knew what to do. I joined Lions, and there's gleaning which I'd never heard about before, what is gleaning? If you don't know, gleaning, is when you collect like leftover harvest from a farm, and then you either donate it, or you make it into food, and Lions, they fed the 5000. They're done a whole event from food they gleaned, and fed Colchester community, which is amazing. But I think the most important thing is, do what you can when you can, because I would absolutely love to be volunteering and helping others 24/7. But I'm currently studying to be a children's nurse, and that's my priority. And I think that is going to lead me into a career of being able to help others 24/7. So, I think you've got to prioritise that as well. But yeah, do what you can when you can.

And really good luck with that and your career as well Ellie Mae, and on a final point, would you encourage young people to step forward and become a young Ambassador.

Find your local Lions Club. I mean, they're everywhere. So, find them, contact them be like hey, I'm doing this, can I have some support? They do so much for young people that no matter what you do, you will get support from them somewhere and the young Ambassador award is just another example of what they do. I mean, my year is almost over. So, you

know, if you get the opportunities, always take them if you've got the time to do it, and yeah.

Thank you so much to Ellie-Mae for the interview, and I'm sure you'll agree, like myself, I'm in awe at what she has achieved so far. It's time now for a very short break - we'll be back, after this...

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For the second part of this episode, we turn to the creativity, know-how and skills that Lion's members use to support a range of good causes in their local communities. Now more than ever, Lions put their enthusiasm and talent to work taking care of the environment. Around the British Isles, for example, they're busy organising litter collections, making bug hotels, and planning annual plant sales. And, later this year, Lions will support a special tree planting initiative to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee.

Among the many keen gardeners in Lions putting their green fingers to good use, is Cynthia Lines. With the support of fellow Hinkley and Burbage Lions, Cynthia raises funds for local charities by opening her beautiful garden in Leicestershire. Chatting with Cynthia, I learned how she'd created the garden, and why so many local people were keen to visit it and support the Lions.

As someone who has recently moved house, I was particularly keen to gain some tips from Cynthia. Whether you're a budding or well-rooted gardener, I hope you'll be as inspired as I am by Cynthia's story.

Cynthia – I'm really excited to hear about your garden, could you tell us its story?

Oh, well, we moved in February 1975. So, we decided to landscape the garden and make it easier in the long run. Yeah, and, and more interesting. It's very heavy clay. So, I have to think twice what to put in and it won't grow rhododendrons or azaleas. I've got lots of tubs and pots, I think I've about 20 the last time I counted. There are mostly evergreens, different

coloured leaves, or most of them flower at some point. There's a lovely witch hazel, which is covered in bright yellow flowers. It's gorgeous. And right next to my front door is something called the Christmas box, which doesn't look very impressive at all, but it's in flower, at the moment. And every time I go in and out the front door, I get a beautiful waft of scent off it. When we moved here, there were nine forest trees in the garden. First that went were the three elms because they got Dutch elm disease and then for various reasons, I'm left with an ash tree and a silver birch,

Lovely. It sounds great. Cynthia, wish I could visit. You've opened the garden to the public for a few years now. What do visitors say when they come? Do you have real gardening enthusiasts?

It's quite mixture of people. But mostly they're so surprised how big it is and what's there, because when Fred was alive, we got a brick-built Summerhouse, a pond with a waterfall behind it. A greenhouse, yes. And there's a pergola along the side of the house. But then when all the trees had gone and after Fred had passed away, I made a pergola up the garden for climbing roses. So, I've got quite a few climbing roses there. And most importantly, I've got about five benches. There's always one in the sun, providing the suns shining, and there's always one in the shade and various garden ornaments I have around. I've got two herons by the pond, hopefully to deter the real live ones, but they don't! They had about 25 Little fish last year. And now all I've got in there are three OAP fish, had them for years, they entertain children when they come.

What about other nature Cynthia, I know it's not just about welcoming people into your garden. It's about welcoming animals.

I do get some lovely birds. Only the other day, this is rare. I saw a woodpecker on the ash tree. My gardening. I'm not obsessive about weeds, but teasels look ever so messy when they've gone over. But I always pull most up but I leave about four or five. Because in the winter, I come down in the morning and all of a sudden there's about five goldfinches on the teasels. And they're so gorgeous, but they're the only birds that can get the seed out.

Can I ask you Cynthia? As a member of Hinkley and Burbage Lions, how nice is it to be able to open your garden. And obviously they pay for their tea and cake and a look around the garden. How nice is it for the Lions to help local charities in this way?

Oh, it's lovely. I like my garden. But it's nice to share it and do some good at the same time. And especially as they give me so much help to do it. Hopefully it will be sometime in June this year. It's usually on a Sunday. But I'm thinking of either a Saturday and Sunday or two weekends. A, if it's very popular, which I think it will be after all this shutdown. It spreads people out a bit, and also, they might not be able to come one week but they could the next.

Cynthia, before we finish, I wanted to ask if you could share any tips for anyone thinking about their garden, what is it about maintaining your garden that gives you pleasure?

I've always enjoyed gardening I think it's in the blood but if anybody's starting a garden, they need to stop and think. And if they want one like mine, which is just purely to look at and not to grow veg, get one or two small trees or bushes. But when you buy them, do read the labels, because they can look quite nice on the label. And then all of a sudden you put it in and a year or two later, it's about 10 foot high. You've got to be sure of the size, just don't be too ambitious. And don't try and do it all at once. I mean, this garden has just evolved over many, many years. Keep doing the different bits, you know and getting something oh U=I like that plant where can I put it? I just enjoy it.

That's great. Well, Cynthia, thank you so much for coming on and agreeing to speak to us. It's been really lovely to learn about your garden.

A big thanks to Cynthia for giving us her time and encouraging the makers and creators among us to get out into our gardens very soon.

That is just about it for this months' podcast, everyone. If you've enjoyed this episode, do check out the LION magazine which can be read online or downloaded from www.lionclubs.co.

Don't forget you can also listen to editions of the Step Forward and Volunteer podcast any time, via www.lionsclubs.co or on Spotify, Podbean, Apple podcasts or Google podcasts.

Thanks once again to our guests, Ellie-Mae and Cynthia, and a big thank you to you our listeners as well. Take care and goodbye.

Thank you for listening to Step Forward and Volunteer, if you want to get involved in local community volunteering visit www.lionsclubs.co to learn more.