

In this fifth episode we hear from Bexhill Lions, Pam Edwards, Sue Saunders and Sharon Webb who tell us about their magical green fairy trail made from recycled materials. Followed by Allan Clark a Keighley Lion using woodwork skills to start a crafting revolution and attract new members.

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

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

My name is Ben Mouncer and I'd like to thank you for tuning in. If you haven't listened before, 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 on the podcast I welcome Pam Edwards, Sue Saunders and Sharon Webb from Bexhill Lions. They've created green fairy trails in local woodlands and this fun idea helps children learn about protecting the environment.

We also have a feature on the Lions Den in Keighley, West Yorkshire. Keighley Lions has many talented members who have taken the club out into the local community. Initially they visited a nearby pop-up shed to run sessions on using woodworking machinery and tools. This led onto a meeting with the Men's Shed development officer from Community First Yorkshire, who suggested the Lions form a shed.

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 three guests from Bexhill Lions. Together with their club members they've come up with a clever idea of creating green fairy trails which are decorated by using donated salvaged and recycled materials. Quiz sheets can be purchased to follow the trail and children are invited to get involved, for example: by painting fairy doors to take home.

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How did the green fairy trail come about and who thought of this enchanting idea?

It was me really, so Pam, I guess I first thought about doing something for children about three years ago. We had a lions stand at a jobs fair. And we're trying to get new members really. So, I spoke to a young mother, and she said that in Bexhill, there was nothing for preschool children to do, and could the lions do anything. So that sort of got me thinking about, you know, we really should do something that might encourage younger people to join us. We started thinking about well, what can we do. So, I thought about my children and what they liked to do, and they love treasure hunts. So maybe a fairy treasure trail. And then I got thinking, well, education, it would be nice to make it educational. So why not make it a green fairy trail and talk about the environment and some of the green issues. And I wanted it also to be low cost because our funds were getting less due to not fundraising. So, we decided to use things that were donated, salvaged or recycled. And I think the first thing I found was in a skip. And it was some wooden fence panels. So, I asked if we could have them. And we started off making Fairy Doors. And its sort of spread from there. And the rest of the club all got involved. And we're all coming up with ideas about it makes fairy things that have glass jars, and tin cans and plastic bottles and all sorts.

A really lovely idea. And you know, you mentioned it Pam, but it's about this message, isn't it reduce, reuse, recycle. Teaching children about those things.

Sue Yes, I think, reduce, reuse and recycle. And lots of children learn about things like that at school. And I think a lot of them have got the added advantage that they've grown up knowing that, so they're probably better at recycling than with some of us adults, actually. And you know what can be recycled and what can't, and we sort of wanted to build on that as well as to how you can reuse the things, not just pop them in the bin. And then they go out the house and you don't really see where they go. So, we had lots of signs around the trail that had data on it about, you know how much plastic is dumped in the sea every year and things like that, which was quite relevant to us because we live right next to the sea, so children see it washed up. And other facts about you know how many trees are cut down, you know, every year to make paper. But a lot of the children were really interested in how we'd used things to make some of the things they could see on the trail. You know, we made the light catchers out of bottles, which we painted and cut up, you know, and they were hanging around everywhere and what they call bee and bug houses weren't they, like tin cans with the bamboo and things like that. And one of the things I had not long joined the lions when the fairy trial started. So, I took on the role of just familiarising myself with everything within the woods, and what had all been made. And I loved it because the children just wanted to know all about what they could use, that they could find at home or in their gardens. And one of the questions on the quiz that they were given. One was just finding all the Fairy doors throughout the woods and then there was one that was more on about the recycled and reused stuff. And one of the questions was, what did you enjoy most? And I thought a lot of children would put finding the doors, but most of them put learning about the recycling and helping save the planet. That was just lovely to hear from, you know, children just growing up in this environment and the message is obviously getting home.

Yeah, that's really powerful that isn't it? You mentioned it a bit there. But how did Bexhill Lion's take on different roles? How did the club kind of really take this project on and make it happen?

We started off with the doors, and we've got a member of the club that's particularly good at woodwork. So, we took on cutting out the doors, then we had a craft session, and

encouraged lots of our members to come because you didn't have to be particularly good at crafts, you know, as long as she could paint, or cut out, or attach ribbon or string to items. But most of the club were involved in different ways. So perhaps somebody's been making posters, somebody's been researching finding different environmental signage. So green issues, what's put on the signs, and then advertising was important. So, somebody else would take on Facebook and making sure that we slowly built up an interest in this fairy trail and just little glimpses of what we were going to be doing. As it got closer, so and then others did the questions you know, to fit the trail. Thinking about what questions to ask, so we kind of tried to involve everybody really.

Now, I've seen the video clips which are available on the lion's website, where you know, there's so many examples of the craftsmanship, miniature fairy schools, gardens, bug hotels, bunting, wind light catchers, jam jar fairies, toadstools, loads more as well, so much creativity on show. What was the response from the families?

Well, some of the children that came to our green fairy trail on the first week also came to the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth week. And we were having to make new quizzes because they were saying, oh, I've done that quiz. I bet you've got another one. And at the end of the trails, you know, we had met so many parents and even children would come up to us and say, ah thank you so much for doing this, we've loved it. And at the bottom of the quiz sheet, we put a little question as to what was your favourite part of the trail? And it was amazing the answers we got. Some it was you know about the environment issues, others, it was finding the little fairies, doing the quizzes, making fairy ones, being out with the parents, having a day with Nana, that sort of thing. So, it was lovely to read all their answers, to be honest.

Some people actually travelled quite a way because I was not allocated a particular task on the day or making crafts on the day, I got to speak to a lot of people that came. And we had families that were coming from Tonbridge, which is probably 20 to 25 miles away from here, yes about an hour. And they'd seen it on Facebook and they decided to come down and they just came en masse because they said you know, it was such a great thing, but it was doing, you know, the fun side and the learning side that they wanted to come down and spend the day in our little woods, seeking out our fairies.

And a lot of people brought picnics, so they started with their children having a picnic on the grass. We chose the woods didn't we, think how many woods we go around?

We did six throughout the school holidays. Yeah, but we've visited quite a few. There are about eight or nine woods around Bexhill.

We decided that on the sixth we did with the better ones so that was sort of open enough so it wasn't sort of claustrophobic but there was a place for people to sit and everything else and people could walk there couldn't they.

So, we tried to accommodate everybody throughout the town really? So, we did woods in various places around the town.

It sounds fantastic. Now with Easter just around the corner as well. Have you got any plans up upcoming?

Yes, oh well. Giving our secrets away now yes, we are planning a green easter trail. The green easter trail is going to be very similar along the lines of the green fairy trails. So, we're still recycling and upcycling and, using donated items. But this time it's going to be chicks, rabbits, Easter eggs with we've got wooden easter eggs that we're actually going to hang in trees with numbers on and different colours and patterns on them.

And easter eggs for children to paint. And then they're going to be able to build a bunny of old socks and decorate the bunny really. So, they choose a ribbon, they choose buttons, they choose eyes, they choose noses and everything else and maybe a heart. And they actually build the bunny to what they want.

So oh, it sounds really exciting. You're letting me into all your secrets now. So yeah, that's gonna be an even better trail. And then the children be fully engaged with the Easter element as well. On a final point, what advice would you give to other clubs who maybe listening to this and wanting to do something different? You know, this is something you've got started, you know, with a blank canvas, really. And it's proven really successful? What would you say to other lions' members who are listening, thinking, oh, you know, that'd be great to do that?

I'd suggest starting early to collect all your ideas together, and then formulate a plan of how you're going to start making these things. Because you don't want one person to end up

doing them all. Start collecting the items that you need. Make sure that you visit the woods before you do the trails, so that you can make sure that you've got a definite entrance and exit.

And a pair of secateurs just in case, a few brambles. And be prepared for how many children might turn up, because we were quite surprised. Our first trail that we did have about 150 children and families, and it seems to be growing. So, we're very excited about the Easter trail, but we're not quite sure how many trips at this time.

And I think as a member, just enjoy it. Because I've been sort of around now when the crafting has been done for the Easter one, I kept thinking I'm not crafty person. I can't paint, I can't draw very well. But I've gone back to like going back to school. And I've been doing paper mâché over balloons to make Easter eggs with flour and water glue. And I've loved it. I've really loved it. So, it's amazing how you get hooked up. And it's no Sunday roasts, because all the craft stuffs all over the table. But we've all enjoyed it.

So, me and my house is just full of craft things. Brilliant.

We had to start in February, probably to be ready. But that was the first year. So obviously we've kept everything. And we'll just be adding to that this year.

So, after the Easter trail, we'll be thinking about some ways of making the fairy trail a little bit different.

Oh, well, we'll leave it on that very tantalizing note then, thank you so much for coming on the podcast and congratulations on what you've achieved. And it sounds really exciting to see how the fairy trail develops in the future. So, thank you. Thank you.

A big thanks to Pam Edwards, Sue Saunders and Sharon Webb from Bexhill Lions for sharing with us how they've created a magical idea to teach more children the reduce, reuse, recycle message in their green fairy trails.

It's time now for a short break, we'll be back after this ...

Never miss an episode of Step Forward and Volunteer listen via www.lionsclubs.co or subscribe via Spotify, Podbean, Apple podcasts or Google podcasts.

Many Lions clubs across the British Isles support men's sheds as they provide vital community spaces where individuals come together to talk, create, have fun and reduce loneliness and isolation.

Mandy Broadbent went along to visit a shed - called the Lion's Den – in Keighley, West Yorkshire. She met with member, Allan Clark, to find out how this facility had become a hub in the local community.

It started initially as an idea. What we needed to do was get more members. So we decided the only way was for us to go out and have a presence in the community, do stuff in the community. So, we were recommended to go to what was called a pop up shed in Oakworth. Within a couple of weeks, I was taking woodworking machinery up and showing them how to use machinery, a scroll saw, a bandsaw and a lathe, and Gordon was showing them how to use hand tools and sharpen chisels. So, while we were doing that, the idea was we would try to find interested parties to join the lions. But then we met a chap from Community First Yorkshire, who asked us if we were interested in starting a shed, a Men's shed, and we didn't really know what Men's Sheds were at the time. So, we did a bit of research and found out that there was nothing in this area and we came to have a look at a place called Cliff Castle. Now there's a museum in a park. And we're actually based in what was the old nursery for the home for the museum. It was disused so when we had a look, we thought wow, this is interesting, and we decided we'd give it a go. So, there's only four of us initially, that started it, three of which were lions. So that's why we call it the Lion's Den. And that's really how the shed got off the ground. Very quickly we became a CIO and became an independent charity in our own right. If the lions want to do a project very often, we might then make that project or we might source the materials. So, we have quite a lot of links and crossovers. We've gained four members and there's probably another three or four that are interested, and the good thing is they're younger, and they're fitter, so we can get out and do more, rather than relying on other people to do it. And that's how we really started.

When we first started, we literally had nothing. There was just four of us, no money, no equipment. We went to the Lions, and we said look this is an idea we're looking at; the long-term goal is to get more members and we agreed a budget of 300 pounds that would be financed from the Lions to help us buy some equipment. So, what we did we went to Aldi's

and bought a scroll saw and the bandsaw just little tabletop ones. Then we sent to Germany for an unbranded small woodworking lathe. Now these were small enough to be able to put into the boot of the car and go out to community centres and things. So, we put the Lions logo on, we put sponsored by Lions and then whenever we were talking about the machines in these different locations, we would say this equipment has been sponsored by the Lions, to try and just get that word out and just get us back in touch with people in the community.

So, it's not just necessarily people coming here. You go to community centres with these tools.

We've always had that community spirit. We've done quite a few projects with community groups, churches, we've even got a project going with the Council at the moment, repairing and refurbishing benches out of the town square. So, we do like going out and engaging with people. We've even been to schools and work with primary schools doing bird boxes and the hedgehog homes. We've had scouts coming into the centre, again, doing bird boxes, doing their woodworking skills to get their badges and it really works well. So much so that after we'd been going for six months we were put forward and actually successful in winning an award from the Council for partnership and collaboration. So, we were very proud of that, very humbled by it.

You mentioned that you're supporting the Council on refurbishing benches.

I saw something on Facebook, and they were pulling out 15 benches from the town square and they said they were getting rid of them because they weren't economical to repair. Now as a shed with guys that have got mental health issues, might be lonely, isolated, or have lost a partner. All they want to do is get hands on and do something. So, we said Well, would you donate the benches to us. And they said yeah, okay. But as soon as they donated them and realized we were going to repair them because it didn't matter about the economics of it, it was an activity. They turned around and said can we buy some back. So far, we've put about five benches back out. We've actually fitted new benches for the Council. We've taken old benches out and we've got a second phase going on now. That will be about another five or six benches and that's bringing money into sustaining the shed, so we are not out of pocket and in fact, we're in a bit of surplus, which helps us maintain and run the shed.

Are these wooden benches?

Yes, these are the typical park wooden benches. They are replacing quite a few now with composite plastics, but these benches are not going back into the town square, what's happened, they did a thing on Facebook saying a seat with a view and they were asking people in the town. Do you know of a spot that you feel a bench would be beneficial to see the view around us which is fantastic, the view, with the Pennines and the Dales? So, we've been placing them in new locations which is great. Where there weren't benches before, we're now putting these benches out in the community for community use and the locations have been decided by the community.

That's really good, isn't it? Yeah, they're really positive. And you've mentioned that you're talking about opening a second shed.

Yes. We were lucky enough to. I mean, here, the Cliff Castle Shed we do woodworking, singing, horticulture, arts and crafts, and general, and fishkeeping and sort of a social area. But we wanted to do more. And there isn't room here to do that. So, we were lucky enough to get a lease on a 25-year-old, abandoned chapel. That had been empty for that long and it was in a bad state of repair. So, we've taken on about a third of this chapel. And we've been doing it up, including rewiring, bringing electric heating in and lighting, LED lighting, painting all the walls, getting already, new windows, new doors, security systems and the idea there is that we'll have bicycle maintenance and repair. We'll be doing railway modelling. The arts and crafts and the singing will move up there. And then we're also looking like a community space to bring in the elderly from around the area to do specific things with them. One of the things I used to do in care homes was around the world in 80 trips. And the idea is that we take people on virtual holidays, people that have long since thought well I won't be going on holiday anymore, but we take them on virtual holidays, including tastes of food from those countries or cities. And it's been very successful. So, we want to involve the community at all times.

And you mentioned to me earlier about the opportunities that it had for intergenerational projects

We got some funding from a company called Unlimited and they're a national funding body and it was to engage with diverse groups. Now one of the barriers we've had in Keighley,

which is quite a high population of Asian, and one of the issues we've had is we've never been able to break through the barrier and get members. So, by getting this funding, we went out and we looked for intergenerational and intercultural groups. And what we found is that we'd be very successful. We now have South Asian members, The intergenerational thing we do a lot with grandparents and grandkids, or we bring in schools and scouts and we work with primary schools, and we've had quite a bit of success with it, particularly in the bicycle maintenance repair. We're hoping to introduce evenings where grandparents and grandkids will come down, work on bikes and then eventually they will be given that bike that they've been working on.

We do a lot of projects for the community. You know, ranging from when we first started, we were approached, the Lions were approached to supply specialist furniture for a disabled preschool kiddie, who couldn't sit in normal school chairs. And so, what we did, we went down and spoke to the school, and we decided rather than just build a chair, at the shed, what we would do is we would design and build four chairs the same and a table to go with it. So, the kiddie involved wouldn't feel left out because his chair was different to everybody else's. Now the other kids could pretty easily sit in the chairs. And that was our first proper project at the shed coming through the Lions. The Lions paid for it. The Shed made it and then the Lions and the shed presented it to the school, and it made such a difference by the time we'd gone to the car and fetched two chairs and the table. We went back for the other two chairs, and they were actually being used. We've done gates for a nursery. The biggest project we've done was for Remembrance Day with a shared church. And that was where we designed and built full size figures of soldiers, ambulances, stretcher bearers. We had a whirlygig pigeon, dog, horse, all involved in basically showing them all coming home tired, fed up, and just glad to be back from the war. Waiting for them was a nurse and a dog at the front of the church. So, you know these community jobs we've done have not only promoted the Lion's Den but have promoted the lions themselves. Yeah, it's been really successful.

Could you tell us about these lovely fish you've got here?

We more or less inherited the fish when we came to Cliff Castle. They used to go out into the ponds and then come in for the winter. But then the Council decided that they were losing too many in the pond and left them in here. However, when we came and set up the

shed in Cliff Castle, we found that the tanks were quite badly maintained. They had trelliswork falling into the pond, it was overthrown all the way down one side of the greenhouse were Yuki trees. So, the fish weren't particularly in good health. The water was not very good. So, one of our members who's a Lion and had his own Japanese garden in Keighley, he said he would help us to get the water sorted and get the fish back up to health. Well, then we decided as a wow factor we would build a Japanese themed surround to the actual pond. Now he suffers with diabetes, related injuries. But he made all the panels in his bedroom at home and then he came down directing traffic for us to assemble and it worked because we hadn't actually opened the shed at this time but when we launched it. We invited the great and good from Keighley. When they walked into the greenhouse, they all just said wow. When they saw it and immediately gave us money, which was excellent because it gave us a start. It's always been a wow factor for visitors. So much so that that the back panel we cut out wood and painted it. And then we even put a panel on with the Lion's Den in Japanese. So that always gets a bit of a conversation going as well because people will say, well, what does that say? And of course, that leads you into the Lion's den, so we've got koi carp and we've just discovered from one of the chaps that we've actually got a lion head fantail goldfish. So, all this time we've got this fish swimming around in the pond and none of us knew what it was. We are the only shed in the country, we believe, and this came from the association of Men's Shed, that actually have Koi carp in their social area.

It's really beautiful, and it's two tiered as well, isn't it?

Yeah, it used to be three, but we didn't really need that. So, we took it down. We flagged the area and it's a bigger social area, to play games, some model making, jigsaws whatever they want.

If you'd like to create a green fairy trail, watch the video clips to learn how to make recycled fairy themed decorations, or explore the idea of setting up a community shed, all these ideas and more are featured in the Spring Edition of the LION Magazine and on the Lions website www.lionsclubs.co

That is all we have time for on this month's podcast. Don't forget you can also listen to past 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 and a big thank you to you our listeners as well. Take care and goodbye.