

Second episode - Paignton Lions member Ian Snell shares advice on photography at events, such as the Walk into the Sea, before wheelchair tennis champion, Alfie Hewitt recalls how Acle and Brundall Lions played a key role in his early career.

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

Hello, everybody, thank you for joining us for this episode of Step Forward and Volunteer, a new podcast brought to you by Lions Clubs British Isles.

My name is Ben Mouncer, and as we're recording at the start of 2022, I'd like to wish you all a very happy New Year. If you're a new listener, the aim of our podcast is simple. We are here to shine a light on the positive difference volunteering makes to communities across the British Isles and beyond. To do that, we will welcome a range of guests to share their stories and inspire others to step forward and volunteer.

We have two exciting features for you on this episode. First, Ian Snell from Paignton Lions joins me to talk about the public response to the recent walk into the sea fundraiser. Ian is a professional photographer, and I've taken the opportunity to ask him how he captures great images. Then we have an exclusive conversation with wheelchair tennis superstar Alfie Hewitt, who has been supported by Acle and Brundall Lions in Norfolk since the start of his career. 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 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, Apple podcasts and Google podcasts. You can listen on demand, or subscribe so that you never miss an episode. We'll be publishing 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 that's enough of me. Let's welcome our first guest. I'm delighted to be joined by Ian Snell, who is a member of Paignton Lions Club down in Devon. It's great to have you on and happy New Year. Happy New Year to you. Now we're here to talk all about the Paignton Lions Club Walk into the Sea event, which I believe took place on Boxing Day. First up Ian, maybe tell the listeners what the event is all about. Yeah, sure. It's just really a fundraiser it's quite a simple sort of walk into the sea event, where participants, local people or those

further afield are encouraged to take part, either sponsored or by paying a fee on the day. They come and take part, in fancy dress, to go into the sea for as long or as little as they want and back out again. All helping to raise much needed funds to help us help the community.

How long has the event been running? The event has been running in excess of about 30 years? Yeah and successfully, thankfully. Why do you think it has had that success and why is it so popular do you think? Because they're all mad, I guess (laughter). Umm, I just think it's probably that time of year where there's a bit of a lull and it makes a difference to go taking the dog for a walk, I suppose you know. So it's a bit of a different activity.

Other than that I don't know really. Yeah, it's just the fun side of it, isn't it? Definitely, and it's fun. I guess the family element as well, going down with your family, daring each other to walk into the sea, bitterly cold winter. That's what brings people together for an event like this. Yeah, definitely. It's the camaraderie, bravery, if you like and you say the fun aspects of putting something like this on that brings the family together. And from a Lions perspective, how successful has the event been in terms of fundraising? The event has been extremely successful in fundraising, and it's one of our major events for the year. So it's really vital that it is successful and it happens every year. So yes, we're extremely proud of our fundraising record on this event and the support that we get from the community.

Great stuff. Now on the day, Ian helped us by grabbing some time with some of the brave souls who walked into the sea in Paignton. We're going to hear from Ian and those now in this clip.

So ladies, can I ask you what made you take part today?

I just thought this year is the year to do something different. It's been an interesting 18 months - couple of years. I've wanted to do it for a long time and yeah, this year is one to push the boundaries.

So what made you pluck up the courage this year?

I don't know, really. It was Christmas Eve and I decided that now is the time, I've got to do it.

Personal challenge. So how much fun was it? Extreme fun, absolutely brilliant. I'll definitely do it again next year! Amazing. Was the water cold? Yes (Lots of laughter).

What charity are you supporting today? I haven't actually named the charity. We are actually supporting the Paignton Lions Club.

Thank you very much (lots of laughter)

Hello, what made you take part today?

We love doing the Boxing Day, every year, and of course, the weather is hot and the sun is shining today. We had all the family with us and it's a great thing to do for the community.

It's ideal. And how much fun was it?

Really, really, really fun.

Was the water cold?

Yes, very cold.

What charity are you supporting today?

Well, we're down here with the Lions Club supporting them and all the local charities and the local people, being together.

That's great. Thank you very much.

Hello, what made you take part today?

We did it last year and we said we would do it this year. So we all did it.

And how much fun was it?

It was really good fun but a bit cold, a bit mind numbing to start off with and we were a bit nervous. But once we got in it was really good fun. Yeah.

Would you do it again?

Yeah, probably just more people. Bring the whole family next year to do it.

And who are you supporting today? Heart charity, British Heart Foundation.

Thank you so much.

What made you take part today?

It's an annual tradition, we try and do it every year.

Was it fun?

It was so much fun. Yeah.

Was the water cold?

It was so cold. It was take your breath away cold

Colder than in previous years?

Definitely, yeah. I think it's because it's sunny. Our body temperatures were already warm.

So we're blaming it on that.

Would you do it again?

I will.

Who are you supporting today?

We are supporting the Lions Club today. That's what we came down to do.

Thank you.

Thank you to those folks who took some time to speak to Ian today, and thank you to Ian for being our roving reporter. Now you're also the event photographer. What are the secrets to capturing the walk into the sea event from a photographer's perspective?

Just making sure really that you capture the essence of the day. Making sure you capture what is going on, people having fun, just really sort of recording what you see.

There isn't anything more than that.

Yeah, you haven't got to create it, as it's pretty much there for you. You might have to get one or two to look a little more braver and a bit jollier and excited about the whole thing, despite suffering from the chills, or the water. So yeah, that's really the essence of it, I think. You get a lot of different faces, then you get some really happy and some really not so happy about the temperature of the water. (laughter here)

Yes the initial impact of the cold water is if you can get that great. But certainly when they come out, there's lots of different emotions and expressions and capturing those is of course important to show the fun side of the event.

And obviously, the fancy dress element as well, that must be great for the photography. Almost definitely, yeah, we get a wide range from various sorts of wild animals to numerous Santa Claus' and his escorts, etc. All sorts of characters we get and we even get our local MP take part although he doesn't come down in fancy dress, but he does support us every year and goes in and comes out again. So yes, it's great.

That's really good, a really impactful event for the local community clearly and now talk a bit more about the photography of it. Obviously, in the voluntary charity sector, it's great to capture images of events like this, but you want it to go beyond just maybe holding a big blow up cheque don't you? What advice would you give photographers around getting the best images at charity events?

Yeah, again, recording what you see but like you say, to avoid the cheque presentation if you can, because no matter how big the cheque is, it's boring, it's very boring. So if you can, if it's a fun event, if you can capture the fun side of it. If it's not a fun event, it's a more serious fundraising then just capture the faces, it's far better than a cheque presentation. If you are making a presentation and have purchased goods, take the photographs of the goods it's far more interesting for the public. And it's actually more attractive to newspapers. The editors, they much prefer that to a cheque. So my advice, show big happy smiley faces, no matter what it is, it's important. Yeah, definitely something different, I guess is the key, isn't it and trying to capture the kind of emotion of the day.

Now you've been a photographer, Ian for many years. I want to talk about that really, and why you believe like photography, images have this enduring appeal, even in the digital age where there are so many different media now, photography still has such strength and

appeal, hasn't it? Yes, it does. I mean, it's more so than ever, because, as you say, of the digital era. But also now, as a result of the digital era, and the progress that it's made, everyone can get an image.

Everyone has a mobile phone now and the quality of the images that can be produced from the mobile phone is incredible. It's almost on a par with the top of the range digital cameras. But it's easier, it's automatic, and everyone's got one in their pocket. So it's instant, you can bring it out and capture those images. The only thing is to ensure that what you capture is creative, is different. And again, go back to the same old happy smiley faces.

But I think that's what I think has encouraged more people to engage in photography with the digital era and the fact that it is so easy, and everyone's got a phone in their pocket. Yeah, definitely, everyone's a photographer now aren't they?

What are your favourite types of photos, though from over the years? It's people led shots.

It's people really, I guess, landscape doesn't really appeal to me and never really has. I worked for a long, long time with local press. So it was people, it was events, it was milestones in people's lives. So, people predominantly, weddings was the other. So it was people very much my interest. I think we're all very different. And there's some real characters out there that need to be recorded forever. And that's what really appeals to me. It actually allows you to be quite creative, as well. So that's what really interests me. Yeah. Brilliant stuff. And that's where we're going to finish. Thank you so much for coming on. I hope you enjoyed it. Yeah, it was great thanks.

We're going to let Ian go now. But don't you go away listeners. There's a lot more to come after this.

Never miss an episode of Step Forward and Volunteer. Listen via www.lionsclubs.co or subscribe to the podcast on Spotify, Apple podcasts or Google podcasts.

My second conversation in this episode of Step Forward and Volunteer, I was delighted to catch up with Alfie Hewitt one of the biggest names in wheelchair tennis. The double Paralympic Silver Medallist who so far has 18 Grand Slam Championships to his name and has a pretty inspirational story which lions are a part of. Alfie was born with a congenital heart defect and diagnosed with Perthes disease at the age of six. As a youngster growing

up in Norfolk, he started playing wheelchair tennis with early financial support from Acle and Brundall Lions helping him achieve his dream of competing in the Paralympics. Despite his success, Alfie has spent the last two years fearing that he would be forced out of wheelchair tennis. Classification changes meant his condition was deemed not severe enough, but just before our interview took place, a review cleared Alfie to continue his career. In the interview, Alfie discusses the support from lions, he reminisces about some of the fundraisers including a catwalk and he shares his renewed optimism heading into 2022. Alfie is such a down to earth lad, and I really enjoyed our chat. He starts by talking a bit more about his trophy laden career.

So I play professional wheelchair tennis. I got into the sport when I was probably around eight, nine years old. That's when my journey started back when I was a kid, I didn't really take it very seriously then, it was all about just picking up a new sport after being diagnosed with the Perthes disease and finding a love for the competitive action again. So yeah, that was where I say it all started. Over the years I gradually increased my training and started playing more tournament's, taking a little bit more seriously, started making a bit of groundwork in the juniors and, I turned professional I guess officially in 2016. That was some year to really start, the Paralympics in Rio in 2016 was an amazing first games for me, winning two silver medals. Since then, it's just been an absolute roller coaster, but a lot of highs. I think we've won the doubles partnership me and Gordon Reid 12 Grand Slams, 13. When you don't know how many, when you can't keep count, I think you've done alright. Nah, nah, we've done well, especially in the last two years. I remember the singles clearly, 5 Grand slams. Got my third Silver in the Tokyo Paralympics. So, you know, it's been a great career to date. I'm currently number two in the singles ranking, and we're number one in the doubles ranking. So I'm in a good position with my career and looking to keep improving really.

If you would Alfie maybe tell the listener a bit about your disability and how you first got into wheelchair tennis. So when I was six years old, I started developing pains in my left knee, and my left thigh, which at the time was just really put down to being a young kid who was passionate for his football, would be pretty active the majority of the days, really wanted to grow up and be a professional footballer for Norwich City. And that was that, my dream back at six years old. But I said these pains started to get worse over time and it

came to about 10 months into these pains where I felt a crack and started to collapse. I was rushed to hospital obviously taken a lot more seriously, that it wasn't just growing pains and actually maybe something was going on here. So I had loads of x-rays and scans done and I came out of the hospital in a wheelchair with an understanding that I had this condition called Perthes disease. It basically affects the left, well for me it was my left hip, the head of the femur due to poor lack of blood circulation and starts to disintegrate the top of it, so they say that almost that the head of the ball starts to crumble and so that obviously caused a lot of pain. I was in and out of hospital for many years and was wheelchair bound from that moment. So not being able to be on my feet was obviously quite a tough transition to get my head around as a seven year old. Then at the time my family noticed that I was missing enjoyment in life. So they got me back in to lots of different disability sports because sport, like I said was everything really, I just wanted to win. I have this competitive nature in me. So I think I took up wheelchair basketball, wheelchair tennis, and archery, which is a bit of a bizarre one. But those were the three sports that I remember playing. Back when I was first diagnosed. It must of took a huge amount of mental fortitude and determination to go on to achieve what you've done, which is incredible. When did you first hear about the lions then and the support they might be able to provide you with when you started out?

It was obviously my family, I was probably around 13 at the time. I want to say I was quite young and still very much in my early days of competing. I was on the verge of reaching I think it was my first ever World Junior Masters title at 13 or 14. Oh no, I wanted to qualify for the Masters event. So in order to be able to do that I needed to compete a bit more, I need to train a bit more. And so my family were not financially in a great place and tennis is a very difficult sport to be able to maintain the almost requirements of what it takes to get to the top. So I remember my mum seeking out help and we found Acle and Brundall Lions Club and they were very welcoming and offered to help us, like I say from that point onwards. The relationship that we had over that time was so instrumental in what happened in the following two years really, yeah. Tell us then Alfie about some of the fundraising lions did for you and the difference that did ultimately.

Yeah, they were amazing. Like I said, they were a big part of that journey at that time. They had a few charity events, I remember they'd been doing car boots around Brundall. And I

swear they had like a funfair in the Brundall area. But obviously the one that stands out, which I know you're going to ask me about, is the catwalk at Jarrold's department store in Norwich which you know, was a great event. They did so well to be able to raise so much money on the evening. I was a young kid, probably not much confidence at the time. So I think going down a catwalk was probably one of the most painful things that I've ever done. It was so embarrassing, you know, people will do anything for money these days.

So I guess that's a sort of the kick up the butt that my mum gave me is, if you want this money, you're gonna have to go down and strut your thing and that's what I did. But now I'm so grateful for the money they raised that night and for the help they gave me. How did they do it then? How did they coerce you into doing a catwalk? Ah, you know, I don't really remember. I think I was probably so nervous at the time that when it came to it, I bolted it down the middle and bolted it back as quick as I could. So it could be over and I can get back into the stands or the side, as I didn't want the limelight. That's the thing I didn't like the limelight at the time and I still don't really like the limelight. But you know, it was fun. I remember being given a stern talking to in the car before we entered that you will go down the catwalk by my family and whatever happens you've got to think of the punters on the night. So you're not going to be a fashion model once your tennis career is over? Absolutely not, if only I had the looks as well.

Good stuff, Alfie. So, you know, looking back at that, I mean, a critical stage in your career, you know, those early days. How grateful are you for that support that the lions gave you? And do you think you would have been able to sort of continue and have the career you've have had without that initial support?

Yeah, massively appreciative of how they helped me out back then, which was probably 10 years ago, if not longer now. I probably didn't realize it until now I've matured and grown up, actually, how vital that support really is in the development of an athlete, in any sport, really. You know understanding the costs of traveling to tournament's, having a companion there, because I was a junior at the time, you know, it all adds up. To be able to gain the experience that was needed to play the matches, and to try and pick up as many ranking points to be able to qualify for these events, because it was around London 2012, as well. So I remember pushing, or trying to push for the team that unfortunately, I missed out by one spot, which was devastating. But you know, if it wasn't for the support that the Lions Club

gave me, no I don't think I would have probably reached my potential as quick as I did. You know, everyone who's helped me out on my journey plays a massive role, and I'm ever so grateful for what they did, and what they gave me. Because, like I said, it's really not easy to be able to fund yourself and you know, I'm extremely lucky now.

But back then when you're starting at grassroots level, it's very difficult. And if you've not got that financial background, it can be a reason for a person to not develop as quick or not to reach their full potential. So, unfortunately it's the world we live in. But, you know, they sort of removed that and gave me that opportunity to be able to train when I wanted and compete when I wanted. So yeah, I am very, very grateful for what they did. And the whole lions ethos is around volunteering and supporting communities and people that need help. I mean, how important do you think that is? I know, you're from the same part of the world as me and I think community and volunteering and being part of the community and helping each other is very much being part of this. You know that it's part of Norfolk and the culture here, like how important is that, do you think generally?

Yeah, really important, what blew me away the most around being with the Lions Club was just that togetherness, you know like you said the volunteers were there, and they're doing it for the sake, out of the good of their own hearts really. There weren't getting much out of it, they just wanted to help other people achieve what they wanted to. In my case, obviously, it was to go far in wheelchair tennis. So if it wasn't for kind hearted people like that, who wants to make a difference within the community and get very little reward, you know, I probably wouldn't be sitting here where I'm at. I think that's something that's really important just as a life lesson really, to be kind, to be nice.

I'm obviously jet setting and traveling around, and to be able to come back to a community like Norwich, which I do find is very warm and very welcoming, and everyone sort of knows everyone, especially my neck of the woods, there's not many secrets about so you know, it's a very, very good place to be and I enjoyed my time working with them. Yeah and you mentioned jet setting and traveling the world there Alfie. Let's talk a little bit about the future. We know now that new sports specific criteria and disabilities mean that you can continue to compete at the highest level in wheelchair tennis, how excited are you heading into 2022 with that? We're absolutely thrilled. Obviously, I didn't know if I had a career in the sport after the new recent changes, which has been difficult to manage over the last

couple of years. But at the end of the day, we got a result that we wanted as a team. And, you know, obviously, I'm delighted to be able to continue what I love to do, I never thought about hanging up the racket anytime soon, really. So to be given a new

lease of life with this decision, I'm feeling motivated, I'm feeling excited. It's gonna be a very, very busy season ahead in the calendar and will hopefully go back to what it's usually like, and that's quite relentless. You know, 2024, Paris Paralympics actually isn't that far away, so I know my sights will be set on that. But we've got many, many tournaments and a few grand slams to play in the meantime. So each tournament at a time. Yeah and on a final point Alfie, you mentioned that it must be like a bit of a fresh start for you and also heading into a new year obviously, a new year always feels like a bit of a fresh start for everyone. Maybe just tell the listener a bit about what you're going to be up to in 2022 and as you said, you're looking ahead to the 2024 Paralympics as well, so what does the next year look like?

So the way the season works it's trying to align itself with the ATP (Association of Tennis Professionals) and WTA (Women's Tennis Professionals) with the hardcourt seasons playing, so that the first sort of five months of the year will be spent on high hardcourts. So I'll be in Australia in Jan, I'll be in Rotterdam in Feb, America in March and then the Asian tour which is in Korea and Japan, I believe in like April and May. So a lot of far, faraway places to travel which shall be close to some serious air miles, but I'm looking forward to being able to compete you know. Obviously with the decision, I wasn't sure this was even going to be a possibility. So I don't think I'll be moaning about having to travel and compete ever again really. So there's that but then we get to May and it will be clay court season going to the Roland Garros French Open. And then we get on to the lovely grass at Wembley in Queens.

So, you know, it's going to be a lot of tennis to be played and you know, hopefully it will go well, I'm working hard right now I want to try and reach the number one spot and the singles ranking is what my ambition is right now. Want to win a few more slams with Gordon and hopefully pick up a few single titles along the way and just keep developing as a player and a person. I think I've been given a completely different mindset with everything that's happened over the last couple of years to now having that weight off my shoulders. I see things in a different way and I'm just wanting to go out there and enjoy my time and work hard.

A big thank you to Alfie for taking time out of his preparation for the Australian Open to talk with me. Now that is all we have time for this month, but we'll be back in February to keep you entertained and informed. If you've enjoyed this podcast do check out the LION magazine published three times a year. You can read editions online or download from www.lionsclubs.co. The Spring issue will feature more photography advice from Ian Snell and an article on Alfie Hewett don't forget you can also listen to editions of the Step Forward and Volunteer podcast anytime via the Lions Clubs British Isles website, Spotify, Apple podcasts or Google podcasts.

Thanks once again to our guests, Ian Snell and Alfie Hewett and everybody who makes this podcast happen and of course the biggest thank you is to you. Take care and goodbye.

Thank you for listening to Step Forward and Volunteer. If you would like to get involved in local community volunteering visit www.lionsclubs.co to learn more.