

In this episode, Paul Allaway from Guernsey Lions talks about an imaginative idea the club has come up with, working in partnership to encourage families to explore the outdoors through the creation of a woodland creatures trail. We also hear from Tracey Field of Chelmsford Lions who joins to tell us why she stepped forward to volunteer at the Commonwealth Games during the Summer.

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

Welcome to the latest episode of the popular Step Forward and Volunteer podcast brought to you by Lions Clubs British Isles.

Before we begin this episode, as members of Lions clubs reflect on the passing of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth the second, her sense of duty and devotion to service will remain an example to us all. Our thoughts and sincere condolences are with all members of the Royal Family.

My name is Samantha Boffin 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'd like to welcome Paul Allaway from the Guernsey Lions. Members of the club have come up with an imaginative idea working in partnership to encourage families to explore the outdoors through the creation of a woodland creatures trail.

During the Summer, Birmingham played host to the Commonwealth Games. We feature Tracey Field from Chelmsford Lions who joins to tell us why she stepped forward to volunteer. Lions Clubs were contacted by the organisers and members were invited to apply to take part as volunteers.

But first, I have a favour to ask. We'd like your help in getting the word out about Step Forward and Volunteer. 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 let me introduce our first guest, Paul Allaway from Guernsey Lions. So thank you so much for joining the lion podcast. Paul. It's great to have you here. It's my pleasure. So you've been involved with an amazing project in Guernsey Paul, Les Vardes Quarry nature walk. Is that right?

Yes, that's right. Yeah.

Fantastic. Can you tell us a bit more about it?

Yeah, sure. Well, the idea came out a couple of years ago when you know, people were unable to get out, one of our members came up with the idea of doing either a nature walk or a trim trial type of walk. Mike Burgess, who's a chainsaw artist from Manchester frequently visits the island and displays his talents and one of the talents was the carving of animals. So Tony Corbin, one of our lions took the idea forward and just had a chat with Ronez who are a local quarry company. A couple of years ago, Ronez opened up a nature walk around the top of the quarry. And this just seemed an ideal location. Further discussions went on, they were quite interested in the idea of having carved animals dotted around the trial. Originally, we were looking at animals that were sort of indigenous to Guernsey, like buzzards, rabbits, etc. But then Tony came across Wind in the Willows. And the characters seemed an ideal fit for the quarry. And over the last 12 to 18 months we've been working with Ronez, with local companies getting sponsorship for the carvings. And also with the local probation service, who helped install the carvings. We pursued the Wind in the Willows route. So we now have at Les Vardes quarry nature walk, six of the characters

from the Wind in the Willows. They are the traditional Mr. Toad or toady to his friends, who is the wealthy owner of Toad Hall, mole or Moley to his friends who's an independent, timid, genial character, Mr. Badger, who's the wise hermit of the group, and ratty, or Mr. Rat, as the charming and affable character who enjoys spending time on the river. We've added a couple more things Mr Rabbit, a Mr Otter, who occasionally make guest appearances in Wind in the Willows. So these have been dotted around the nature walk, which is a two kilometre walk around the top edge of the quarry. So the views are quite amazing. You can look right down into the quarry about, I don't know, four or five hundred feet below. And then when you get to the top of the walk, you've got views over the Island of Guernsey and out to the West Coast, it's fantastic. The idea being to get families out with their children, looking at the characters, and hopefully going back and reading about them. So to encourage a little bit of education as well as leisure activity.

Actually, it's funny because when I actually read up on this I discovered that Kenneth Graham had been inspired by his local quarry woods, where he actually grew up and I thought that was an amazing coincidence.

Yeah, yeah, it's a lovely coincidence. I didn't pick up on it, is good to know. Yeah, so these characters individually dotted throughout the trail. So immediately one as you're walking through, yeah, you come up from the car park up a small hill and then you come across Mr. Mole, who sort of welcomes you as it were on to the trail. And then as you go around the 2 km, the other five characters are dotted at various places and at the top of the walk, there are actually picnic benches, etc. But one little feature we've added, at the beginning of the walk is what we call a whisper seat.

Yes, I wanted to ask you about that. Because when I saw that I thought it sounded wonderful, but what is the whisper? See, then tell me a bit about it.

I suppose it's developed from the talking benches idea where people sit at these brightly coloured benches and if somebody sits down next to you, you have a chat. We've sort of developed it a little bit more for children. The bench is carved by chainsaw, as are all the animals. One side of the bench one arm features the wise old owl, which was an animal selected by Ronez and you will see a few owls around the quarry. On the left hand side. We have a carving of a lion. Obviously, in keeping with the Lions Club. The idea really it's a fun

idea for children to sit down, put their arm around the animals whisper in their ear, you know any thoughts they have? So it is a bit of fun idea, but it has taken off. Yeah, we we've had interest from Jersey lions who are looking to get one. We've agreed with our local education authority to put one in Sark, which is about three miles off the coast of Guernsey and one of our sponsors. Ravenscroft, who have an office in Alderney are looking to put one in Alderney as well.

Wonderful. So there'll be whisper benches, all with lions on them presumably with an owl or with something else on the other?

I presume because it's the same person carving, it will be with the owl and the lion.

Wonderful. Is it predominantly used actually by families with children? Or Is anybody going on this trail?

I mean, the trail is for anybody and everybody. It is children friendly. And there are you know, there's blackberry picking and everything on the way at the right time of year. it's a nice two kilometre gentle climb. When you get to the top, as I say, there's picnic benches, but there's also an old fortification, which is got info boards around it telling you about what's happening in the quarry. And where to go from there you can either come back down the trail to where you started, or you can go down a set of steps and get back to the to the carpark Oh, you can just do a circular route.

The quarry itself, you were saying is it a working, fully working quarry. So any given time you're watching this whole quarry being excavated is that yes, yeah. But that's when it is fully working. I believe they do blasting on a Friday afternoon, because they're still blasting out some of the granite. But you will see the trucks going in picking up the granite or the shale and everything because it does supply the island with material for road building, etc.

It's just amazing. So when did this actually open this trail?

The trail opened in July this year. It was opened by Gloria Dudley Allen, who is the President of our Education, Sports and Culture Committee. And yeah, with sponsors turning up with people from Ronez there as well.

And is it been popular this Summer? Is it really taken off?

Yes, Yeah, the feedback we've had on Facebook, it's been fantastic. People have really enjoyed it.

So were these characters made elsewhere and then bought on to Guernsey?

Yeah, the characters are round about five foot five and sit on a wooden plinth. All the characters are carved by Mike Burgess, as I said, and they're all done by chainsaw. So it's fantastic. When you look at them, they were all done at his base near Manchester, and then using local companies Ferry Speed, etc. They very kindly shipped everything down to Guernsey. We then had to transport them up to Ronez and then we had to get them up onto the path. Obviously, from the bottom of the quarry, so fortunately, Ronez have a little truck and with the help of various people, they were set up, holes with the concrete was put in, was helped from the County Probation Service. We have people setting them in the concrete.

So it was a fully collaborative idea this everybody gets together to make this happen. Yeah, each sculpture was topped off with a coat of varnish to sort of weather protected. And that's something we're gonna have to look at, obviously, on an annual basis is the ongoing maintenance but absolutely, clothes they're dressed in, and yes, they're all painted. Mr. Molars got a blue jacket on badgers got his coat on, Tony's got a jacket on and some gloves. And each statue has got a plinth sign on the plinth saying sponsored by lions club of Guernsey and the local companies. Wow, you know, they've all been involved. Yeah. Incredible.

And for the children? Have they really kind of got on board with those characters. They're doing lots of photo opportunities, that sort of thing.

From what we've seen on Facebook, yes. So they are certainly getting out there and looking at it.

So when you were working with Mike Burgess, did you what kind of input did you have into the designs? Or didn't you?

Not really, on his website, he's got a whole load of characters. And because the theme was Wind in the Willows, he basically said, Well, I can do this, this and this. And that was that,

that was all we wanted, you know, because obviously, we're in Guernsey. He's in Manchester, it was just left to Mike to get on with it.

And is that so for the Whisper bench as well? Did you have involvement in creating the Whisper bench idea?

Tony was talking to Mike and they came up with the idea of doing a bench. And then they just extended into having an owl and a lion. And so amazing that those benches are going to be replicated on in different places as well. That's a really, yeah, that's absolutely wonderful. I say I love the idea that this was such a collaborative venture. What would you say to other people who might be interested in getting involved in setting up something similar? Have you got any tips for them?

Obviously, you need to find a location. That is fairly public. Public Access the idea can vary. You know, you can have animals indigenous to the area. Speaking to a Lion a few years ago, he was looking at doing a gruffalo trail. Have a look out for a site, decide what you want. And don't be afraid to approach local companies for sponsorship. We approached companies the cost of the sponsorship of the animals, including freight and everything came in at about 950 pounds each. So it's not a cheap overall project. So you need to be prepared to spend but you know if you can get local sponsorship, then that's pretty good. Obviously though, doing anything in the UK. You haven't got the freight cost of shipping

So, if we came to Guernsey if I came here tomorrow, where would we be able to locate this adventure trail this nature trail?

Right Ronez quarry is situated in the northwest of the island. It's on the west coast. So you just literally follow the coast road around, eventually you'll come to around a quarry on the right hand side. And then there is the start of the nature trail.

And it's not just in the middle of the island then so you've got all the sea views as well as the quarry.

Yeah, when you get up on top, you've got a view over the West Coast. You know, you can see out obviously over the sea, you can look inland as well as there's a view inland.

Alongside the Nature Trail, and this this might appeal to some families, they've recently opened the BMX track. So you've got our nature trail going two kilometres up overlooking

the valley, and to the side of it. There's a BMX track for cyclists to use. So it is becoming more and more accessible for people.

But then what a brilliant, you know, thing to put on the map in terms of involving people, you know, getting families out there, it's got all hallmarks of just the most brilliant activity, and presumably all year round. It is yes, I mean, there are no, no closing times at all it is open all year round.

That's amazing. Well, thank you. So it's so interesting, and there's some beautiful pictures that I've seen online of the bench being opened and also the figures themselves, so it's really worth having a look at those.

Wow. Well, thank you so much.

Thank you for sharing Paul the beautiful nature walk with the animal adventure trail and children's whisper bench. For those that would like to explore this 2km Wind in the Willows trail, visit www.guernseywithkids.com/les-var-des-quarry-nature-walk/

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

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Tracey Field from Chelmsford Lions was chosen from 42,000 applicants to be part of the Event Volunteer Service at the Commonwealth Games which were hosted in Birmingham over the Summer.

Oh, well, hello, Tracy, thank you so much for coming on the Lions podcast.

Hello, Sam. Thank you for inviting me.

So this summer, you did something pretty special as a volunteer. Can you tell the listeners just a little bit about what you got up to?

Yes, certainly. So I volunteered along with fellow lion Judy Chandler for volunteering at the Commonwealth Games.

That's so exciting but what are the Commonwealth Games.

The Commonwealth Games is the athletics and other sports, including some that perhaps you wouldn't normally get in events like the Olympics, where all the different countries that belong to the Commonwealth come together to take part in. So it's multinational. Lots of different ethnicities and languages spoken. So it's a huge feat in organising it. I don't know how they do it. We did meet some other people that were involved in other sides of the volunteering, and we could see how much organisation was involved in it all.

Yeah, it is amazing. They're called the friendly games. I hear the Commonwealth Games.

Friendly, but still competitive.

Indeed, absolutely, so when was this? You worked as a volunteer at the games along with your friend Judy Chandler.

Yes, that's right.

So you worked as a volunteer. What did you actually do while you were there?

Our role, and there were many different roles we were called honorary stewards. So for us, our role was mainly what we were described as the friendly face of the games. So we were the people that would meet people, the spectators as they came through the queues, we would direct them to where they needed to be. We were the ones that they'd approached with a question. And basically, it was just an information finding point. And being that sort of friendly face that was approached for, for any of the spectators when they had queries.

Did you choose what you did when you were there? Were there other roles that you could have done?

We didn't choose we were allocated. The process for actually being able to be a volunteer at the Games involved, application form and then an interview. So on your application, you'll have to say what some of your skills were. And in the interview, they drew that out further. So they matched you to an appropriate role based on your experience and what you've done previously.

So out of interest, why did you volunteer for the Commonwealth Games? What made you want to do that?

It wasn't something we sought out, all Lions Clubs were contacted with this opportunity to volunteer. So we discussed it at our club meeting. And there were a few of us that were interested, but it did require quite a lot of time commitment. So Julie and I were the ones that decided we could make that commitment. And that's why we decided to apply, partly because it was a once in a lifetime opportunity. We might not get that opportunity again, or not so close to home. We thought it was now or never possibly.

So as you say it was close to home. But it was actually quite far up the country, wasn't it?

Well it was, but comparatively to it being hosted in Australia next year, it's close. So for us, it was an opportunity to be able to do it in our own country, which I don't know how long it will be before we get that again.

We were based in Coventry. The main event was based in Birmingham. But they were different venues being used around but they there was Velodrome at Lee Valley VeloPark, so that's actually even closer to us. But we actually were positioned in Coventry at the Coventry arena and stadium.

How many people in all were there that actually volunteered to be volunteers?

I think that they started off with something around like 48,000 people apply. I'm not sure how many they whittled that down to for the interview process? But there were 1000s, I think, involved in the whole process. There were so many different venues that we had to be sort of manned, the whole time. So we had three shifts per day, and you were allocated to one of those shifts? So that's a lot of people involved. I think it was 14,000 volunteers.

Wow. Yeah.

So the events that you actually worked on? Were you able to choose which events you could volunteer for?

No, no, we weren't. I think some people were lucky, and got sports that they enjoy watching. On the application form, you were asked whether there was a venue you would prefer to go to or a sport that you would want to go to. And I wasn't familiar with all the venues. So I just said any venue. And the sports I did tick a few of the ones that I thought I would like to see. But they didn't come up in my allocation.

So which ones did you actually tick?

I ticked things like gymnastics, which I quite like, and a few others sort of similar to that and some of the athletic events because those are always good to watch as well.

Which ones did you actually get?

I got rugby sevens. Never seen it before, and judo and wrestling.

So what is rugby sevens?

Rugby Sevens is there are seven people on each side. And that game lasts for 15 minutes. So it's really speedy, quick game. They do switch over ends halfway through, but they do use the whole rugby pitch. That's a lot of pitch for some people on the team to run around. But I guess it's easier to follow for people that don't know it so well, because you've only got the seven people on each side to watch. And you said earlier about it being the friendly games, we did get to see some of the rugby. And I think that became apparent because it didn't matter which sides or where you came from you, you would cheer both sides.

So, so don't back to the training part of it. So was there quite a lot of training involved?

What was that like?

There was for our role. We were there to support the stewards, the official stewards as well. So we actually had to undertake all the steward training, which is a two day course, we had to travel up to Birmingham for that. And there was a lot of homework involved as well, there was a workbook for us to complete. And mainly that was done at home, on an individual basis other roles didn't have that. But yeah, we're all as honorary stewards that was required. Everyone also had a venue specific training day where you would go and actually see the venue that you were going to be at so that you could familiarize yourself with all the entrances, exits, where the different events were being held. And all the facilities that were there as well.

So it must have been quite different when you went to see them so virtually nobody there then. What was the difference then when everybody came in?

Yes, it was completely empty apart from there was still work going on to do so to make the setting up for the different events. When the event started, particularly the rugby where there were more spectators, it was just a completely different venue. And of course all of it

was open and accessible to all the spectators and to us as well. So it was much more buzzing and lively and many, many people around as well.

Did you get to see many other events that you weren't necessarily stewarding?

We got to see it during our breaks any of the events that were happening whilst we were there. So the shifts that we would have we would be sort of working as it were when people were entering. So we would be out in the queues sort of entertaining people with the Perry the bull frames then for their selfies and we had books to give out to the children and foam hands for high fiving people as they came through, then after everyone was in, we would then have a bit of a break. So during that time, we would be able to go and watch when everything was on.

So you and Julie, were you always together? We were in the same team. We didn't know we were going to be allocated to the same venue, even when we applied. We were lucky enough to get the same venue and the same role. And yes, we were actually in the same team, when we got there although we weren't together the whole time, we were doing the same role. And usually on the same gate, or with the same task.

Bet that was nice, actually.

But the thing about the whole, the whole event was you made friends with other people that were on your team, or the people that you worked with. So it didn't really matter when we weren't together because we knew other people that we'd never met before. But got to know us-

It's one of the nice things about doing it, I would think so. What would you say your experience was of volunteering? Would you recommend it to other people to do?

Yes, I definitely recommend it. It was hard work at times, especially on the rugby finals day where there was the most spectators, it was really, really busy that day. The experience that you gain from it just being part of it. The role itself gave you sorts of skills and meeting people, all of it made it that hard work worthwhile.

Are you're now on the circuit, so to do other sports based volunteering work?

Not really, each individual event would have its own volunteers, if they were required the course that we did for stewarding means that there is a qualification at the end of that. So you could be a steward if you wanted to be. And that's actually a paid role. Whereas of course, the volunteer is unpaid. And there is that opportunity for those that completed that training. But now that you've got that experience, it would make it easier for anyone that has done it to do it again.

Would you do it again?

I would, I would definitely do it again, perhaps at events that aren't quite so long. I was working in between the days when we had shifts. And it would be lovely if there was sort of like a two or three day event that we could do that.

Thank you so much for sharing all that just sounds fascinating. I'm actually tempted to volunteer myself at a sporting event there.

So were you always at Coventry stadium.

Yes, we were, other people went to other venues as well. Look, some of the venues actually in Birmingham, we only went to those to see the opening ceremony rehearsal, which all the volunteers were invited to go to. And we also had tickets to get into the closing ceremony and some of the gymnastics.

Wow, that must have been exciting though. The opening and closing ceremonies.

Yes, it was it was very good.

It's a bit like a stage show. The opening ceremony had more of the theatrical side, the closing ceremony had more of a musical side

The atmosphere must have been amazing.

Yes, yes, it was. Yeah. And that's one of the reasons why all volunteers and other groups were invited to the rehearsals so that they, the performers could still get that atmosphere. It wouldn't have been the same for the people taking part if they didn't have that.

I can I can see that. Yeah. Well, thank you so much. Thank you. Tracey. That was really interesting.

Thank you. Thanks very much for having me come along and talk about it. And yeah, I'd still say definitely go for it, if you get the opportunity.

Were there any other lions that were involved in the volunteering?

Yes, they were there were lots. Obviously, we didn't meet all of them. But we met some on our training days. And when we were in Coventry, actually it was on the last day that we were there.

Exciting. So you got to meet people from all around the country.

Yes. All the volunteers actually came from all over the country. There was some from Scotland, some from Cornwall, that we met others more local, which was really handy for directing people out of the venue to the right place, and use their knowledge for that.

Thank you for sharing your rewarding experience of volunteering with us Tracey.

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 special guests Paul Allaway and Tracey Field and a big thank you to you our listeners as well. Take care and goodbye.