

In this latest podcast, we hear from Fiona Reilly, a member of Horley Lions. Last year, Horley Lions set up Warm over Winter campaign working in partnership with a range of organisations to support families who are struggling, due to the rise in food and fuel costs. We also feature John May from the Bert Mason Internet Lions who has been actively working on the Lichfield and District Talking Newspapers for 41 years. John talks about what this vital service means for those that are blind and visually impaired.

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.

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, we hear from Fiona Reilly, a member of Horley Lions. Last year, Horley Lions set-up Warm over Winter campaign working in partnership with a range of organisations to support families who are struggling, due to the rise in food and fuel costs.

We also feature John May from the Bert Mason Internet Lions who has been actively working on the Lichfield and District Talking Newspapers for 41 years. John talks about what this vital service means for those that are blind and visually impaired.

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, Fiona Reilly, from Horley Lions. Thank you for joining the LION podcast Fiona. Hi ya Sam.

So can you tell the listeners Fiona? What made Horley Lions get involved the Warm over Winter campaign, and what it's all about?

Yes, of course. Thank you for having me on today really excited? Yes, we want to share what we're doing on the Warm over Winter campaign, which I have to say is, it's been a great success for us and really pleased about that, because it's all help for the community. Warm over Winter, that was the name we came up with. Called WoW, we could shorten it to WoW, which we thought would get a bit more impact. But the Warm over Winter campaign actually started last year, where one of our members came to my husband, Alan and I, we are both lions members. And he said, Oh, you know, one of the other clubs, I think it was Farnham he said, we've got this project Wenceslas. And it's targeted at those people who received the winter fuel allowance, but don't necessarily need and want to donate it. Because a lot of people would actually say that to the Lions Clubs, how can I actually donate my allowance. So that's where the idea came from, ah, ah, one of the other Lions Clubs is actually targeting that. And we looked at it and thought, You know what, let's expand it, let's change the name of it. So that it's not just seen as a, you know, one time of the year where you could do the actual campaign, let's change it a bit and actually target everyone who wants to donate. And if we explain about the Warm over Winter what it is we're trying to achieve, which is raising money to help those that, you know, are having to choose, some of them between eating and heating. And we didn't want that. And it's, you know, last year, energy prices were, you know, increasing terribly for families. And we decided that let's look at how can we actually raise money around this. And as a club, we have some very strong

supporters of the club, sponsors that we worked with for years. And we actually came up with our marketing campaign, then to promote it to see like, how much can we actually raise here? And we created posters, and one of the key sponsors, and I'll name him actually Keymex. He's a great sponsor of the Horley Lions. We met up with Richard, he's lovely. We told him all about the campaign. We said, look, this is what we want to do. You know, he said, Yeah, you're right brilliant idea. Let's do this. So we created the banners. And we then said, right, we need to think about doing the JustGiving page because people can then donate online if they want to. And we built a campaign around that. We also put all the information up on our website. We did all social media, twitter, you know, Facebook. And then it was actually through the banners because you can't just put banners up anywhere.

We had speak to Reigate and Banstead because we wanted to put them up around Horley and so we discovered Reigate and Banstead Community development team. And we got chatting to them and told them what we were doing. And they actually said, You know what, we've been trying to do this. And we've actually got some money in a pot. If we support you with this, because you're doing something that we can't do, which is you've got people on the ground from the Lions, willing to actually, you know, help people face to face? Whereas, we struggle you know, to have the resources to do this. So actually, if we give you the money that we've got in our budget, would you then, you know, help us spread this into the community? And we said yes, absolutely. So then we worked really closely with the community development team, it was great then expanded out and speaking to the churches of Horley foodbank and the food hub that operates in Horley. And those are the areas and the places where we actually invest ourselves because this is where it's all referrals, you know, these people that are referred to the food banks and to the food clubs. So, you know, we know that these people do need help, and we do the food club and food bank because you get the different demographics. So you're targeting the young families at the food banks. And in food club, you're targeting the elderly people. So, so last year, you know, it was great. We raised over 8000 pounds. And that was a combination of donations from the lions events that we do throughout the year, donations from people going online and giving donations on our JustGiving page. And then we have donations from Reigate and Banstead Community Development team. As I said, and then we also had a donation from the church of Horley food bank they wanted to support the communities as well. So we said

yes, that's great. So 8000 pounds last year was raised. And we, we spent that over a 16 week period. And we just based ourselves in the food banks and food club. So how it works is you will have people come in, because people will have different ways that they obviously pay for their gas and electric. So what happens is you will have people that might come in with their gas cards, or the electric, will have the keys to their cards. And then you might have people that are on direct debit, that's so then you have to look at who their energy provider is that they are using. So we've got a whole list of all the different energy providers. We can then hand that off in the evening to our treasurer and secretary, then you know, with approval of payments, because we have a system, with a bank account set up as well within the lions. So we separated that out so that all of our money in donations for specific payments comes out of a specific bank account.

That's amazing. So it's a really collaborative venture. So you've been able to bring all these different strands together to create something, you know, really powerful actually, that's amazing.

Yeah. So last year, we helped 86 households, which was a total of 236 children and adults. Wow.

So this was actually set up originally last year, where actually things didn't look as bleak as they look this year. So you had everything in place. Yeah.

So the good thing was, you know, I'm so pleased that we did actually set it up last year because it put us in a great place for this year when things are really awful for families. I've also been on BBC Surrey Radio, and James Cannon has asked me on a couple of times. So this year has been great. This has been so exciting, because, because of all the work that we've done with all the marketing campaigns and all the social media and all the activities we've actually had, and they want to remain anonymous, but you know, we have had some lovely big donations to the Wow Campaign for this year. So much so that, you know, we've actually through our own work that we do as Lions raising money through events, and also money from these very generous donators. We actually now have several thousand pounds this year of donations, and also what we did this year we wrote off to for example, the Tesco Community grant scheme, you know, the blue token. It looks like we've won that vote. So again, that'll be putting money towards the Wow campaign and I'm due to get the

notification of that, in the next week or so, and we'll do a big press release around that. And then we also wrote off to the Community Foundation for Surrey, and they believe that they've found us a donor for another 5,000 pounds. So I'm just waiting to hear on that as well. So, so there's different ways this year that we've tried to raise the funds, you know, we've written off to other areas. And we've worked with other organisations such as the Henry Smith Charity, and as well have been helping us also to spread the word if you like. So again, it has been through referrals. We did a promotion this year, actually, it was the World Teachers Day, and the Horley Lions were supporting schools and presented them with lovely orchids. And as part of that message, we've actually told schools that you know, if they know of any families needing any help, then please know, this is where we are on a Wednesday and a Friday every week, and we'll be there for the next 16 weeks. We do two hours on a Wednesday, and we do two hours on a Friday morning at the food club and two hours at the food bank on a Friday afternoon, so they've got the opportunity to come and see us. And as I say we put money, directly on to people's cards. It goes directly onto their you know their energy, they will see it and then I mean, I've had people come in to me and say, Fiona, that's great. I can now go home and have a shower and put my heating on. Thank you so much. Because if they've got their cards, we take them down to the post office, and money goes on that card straight away.

Wow. That's incredible. So not only are you able now through going through the schools, who know where the people who really need help are. But when they come to the food banks, they can have their energy accounts topped up, almost there and then, that's amazing.

Yeah, yeah, if they've got the cards and the keys happens instantly, if they pay by direct debit, then it'll take a few days, because we obviously have to, then that goes through the Horley Lions, Treasurer and Secretary just for approval. We don't always say a set amount, because it depends on if there's quite a big family, or there are disabilities in the family, then that gives us an indication of how much we can help them. But see, we start off really not with big, huge amounts, because actually this year, we believe that I mean, already we know we are seeing, you know, more than double what we saw last year.

Yeah, I'm gonna ask that. If there are so many more people who need this kind of support?

Yeah, definitely. We just know so. So we're trying to just balance you know, and make sure we're not giving out too much too soon. And we want to try and help especially new people that haven't come to us before and we haven't seen before. It's going well, we really enjoy it, you know, a lot of very nice people, and it's very rewarding. What we do with Horley Lions.

And presumably you see the same people every week or every month.

Yeah, you do sometimes. And then sometimes you might see them, and then they'll say, oh, you know, I've got a job interview. And then you say, oh, good luck, then, you might not see them again, you know, so it varies as well, you know, sometimes you see them one week, two weeks, and then you don't see them again. But for a family how it works is, I believe they're referred to, for a period of time, the family they might get a three week referral from the Citizens Advice, for example, to come down to the foodbank.

It makes a big difference, you know, have a hot meal to be able to warm the house, these are really important things that they've been able to do.

Yeah, no, you know, it's just lovely, because they're so you know, they say, Oh, thank you so much. it's really rewarding,

I bet. No, absolutely. And do you yourself, Horley Lions, do you need to raise more funds all the time? Are you always kind of outward looking?

We're always looking at ways to raise funds. I mean, we do events throughout the whole year. So we allocate certain amount of funds to the WoW campaign. But we also look at other ways that we can raise, you know, donations, we know that there are plans with the community development team, you know, providing some funds for us. And just waiting to hear from the Community Foundation for Surrey. We know that there's some other companies and local businesses that want to donate. And we had a lady came in at the food bank the other day and said, I love what you're doing, how can I donate to you? You know, and there's all different ways.

That's the incredible thing is that you've got people, you've got companies who can raise funds, but also individual people are coming in and donating, you know, that what they can to help support other people. It's wonderful.

Yeah, and they can do it online if they want to, or they can say there's a cheque, or, you know, they can do it however they want, you know, they can donate anyway, it's all available to them. So we're really grateful. And I just think, it's you know it's getting more and more awareness of the campaign is, is really heightened. You know, because of all this social media we've done, we've worked with all the different local publications as well, we've worked with RH Uncovered and Streetwise, which is a little local magazine that goes all over an A5 size and we know that that goes to 14,000 households. Wow and yeah, in our area. So that's great. And they're kind again, you know, we're not charged for this, which is great, because they love what the lions do, they provide us with a full page coverage. And just about every quarter, and we put in an advertising about the WoW campaign, and the events.

But what a huge amount of effort and energy on your part, though, actually, to actually reach out to all these different people, all these different ways of getting the word out there. I mean, that's incredible that you've done that.

It's just great. One of the churches of Horley, so they wanted to do a video outside the foodbank and we'll meet with them actually, again, talking about the campaign. And he's coming tomorrow to do an update video again. I know which is great. So then what he does, is he puts that out across all the churches, and believe it or not, I don't know how it's got to Australia. But we were seen in Australia last year.

So what advice would you give people if they wanted to do a similar kind of thing?

Getting, you know, in front of all the local communities. I mean, we work closely with Horley, you know, the Horley Community Centre, the manager, working with your local councillors, we know local councillors who support us as well and put up all our posters and banners and help us with that. and it's just and then obviously, social media plays a big part nowadays, you know, Facebook, Twitter, going massive and just even Just Giving a good platform to raise awareness and funds. You know, a lot of people do that. But even, you'll have noticed that they're doing PayPal Giving now you can go through PayPal. So we're looking at, you know, signing up for things like that, it's really easy. I just think just, you know, constantly tapping into other channels, you can, you know, speaking to your local magazines and just being in front of people saying you're making them aware of what you're

doing through, through your events is, is the best way is where we always promote everything that we do, and we're very visible, you know. I think being visible in the community is the key thing through just letting people know, I mean, what we do, after we do events, we then do a lot of PR around the donations that we do. So I've got a whole catalogue of you know, pictures that I keep and put up on social media, where we've donating throughout the year to others, you know, charities and organisations. And again, when you go and visit those people, you're also talking about what you're doing with other companies and other organisations that are also supporting local communities. I think is the way that you get your profile ready to get the visibility, and you get the message out there that you know, this is what the lions are doing. Because that's, that's what we are about you know, we serve and that's what we want to do is to serve in the communities. And this is a perfect way of doing it to be honest.

Thank you so much Fiona, that was so interesting. And yeah, and something other people can really get behind as well. But your actual campaign, but also other campaigns like it, you know, that's incredible. Thank you so much.

Thank you.

For more information about the Horley Lions Warm over Winter campaign, please visit www.horleylions.org.uk

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.

Our next guest, is John May from Bert Mason Internet Lions who joins to tell us all about the Talking News and how vital this service is to the blind and visually impaired within our communities.

Hello, John. Hello. Thank you so much for being on the LION podcast. How long have you been involved in talking news and what started your involvement?

A complete accident started me. It was 41 years ago. And I was a member of the local Lions Club and I went to go and tell them that I can't go to the meetings. For a while, while I was setting up this business, and it was just a pure coincidence, when I walked in to the reception, there was a blind man there with a guide dog. And he said to me, as I went past, are you in the lions, I said, Yes, he said, what you're doing is fantastic. I said, thank you very much. And then I went to the meeting. I'd missed the previous meeting because of work. And they said, oh we've looked at starting a talking newspaper, and we've decided we can't afford to do it. And I said, excuse me, there's a blind man downstairs getting very excited, does he think we're going to do one? They said, Well, he was in the bar when we went talked about it. But they told us it would only cost 1500 pounds. This was 1980-1981. And they said, we've looked at it and it's actually going to cost 4,500 pounds. We haven't got that kind of money. So I said no, we've made a promise, we've got to keep it. And so I contacted the Mayor. And I said, Would you hold a public meeting? And we will invite every service organisation in the town, which we did, Rotary, Roundtable, Townswomen's Guild Soroptimists, and everybody and we, we invited blind people. And they said how vital it would be to them. It got very emotional, the meeting. And I said to them. There's too much emotion involved. I want you to make the decision in the cold light of day when you thought about it. But the lion President stood up and said, Well, we have thought about it, we'll give you 1500 pounds. Well, I'd got the Rotary there and the Roundtable, and they couldn't have that. So I came away with the four and a half 1000 pounds. Amazing. And we've been doing this ever since. What a great story. Just a total fluke that that man was there.

Yeah. And then that's all before the internet for being able to contact people. In other ways. You actually just went out and got everybody involved. Yeah. Yeah. Amazing. So how many how many talking news services like this are there in the British Isles, would you say?

I think we may have lost a few during the pandemic, but I believe there's still over 500. Probably about 520. Wow.

So 500 - 520 across the British Isles. Yes. That's incredible. Wow. So you were saying that how important it was to blind or partially sighted people. So can you give us a bit more background on that? What does this service mean to your listeners?

It's the two expressions that we hear the most. You are a lifeline. And you are the friend that lands on our doormat. And what people don't realize is how many blind people there are in the country. You don't see that many you may see the odd person with a guide dog or with the white stick. But you will or if they are hanging on to somebody else's arm. You might not be aware that they've got a slight problem but in the main, they stay where they feel safe, which is at home. So they become isolated because they're staying at home, they outlive their family, they outlive their friends, and they become very lonely. So, we give our listeners 21 hours a week. So they've got three hours a day where they can listen to friendly voices So they might, might even be listening to subjects they're not really interested in. But, but they're listening every day is. And since we started doing that the reaction has been fantastic.

Wow. So do they get news every single day on their doormats no,

No we send once a week, with 21 hours on it. Wow. So they wait till the next one comes.

We have three in each person's name. And it's a totally free service. They don't pay for the equipment playtime and they don't have to pay postage, that items for the blind, is postage free. If we had to pay the postage, we wouldn't exist very long.

So each individual person has three USB sticks that are always on the move as it were. So there's one being recorded, one in the post as it went on one with them. That's just brilliant.

So and they get the local newspapers. Yeah,

Yes, they get all the local newspapers. And I remember one day it was a nurse doing home visits. And she said to me, I can't do my work on a Friday. Because they want to talk about what they've heard in the talking newspaper. And they're better informed than anybody, because we sit by and they listen to everything you say. And I said, Ah, I'm sorry about that. And she says you don't understand. Before that they never used to speak at all. So we just opened them up. So

That's just incredible. And to find out, you know, 21 hours of finding out what's in your local community, what's happening? Presumably, a lot of these people have lived in that area all their lives. Yeah. Yeah.

Every talking newspaper is different. But what we don't do is put in births, deaths and marriages. Because you get the deaths, and somebody saying, Oh, I'll beat them. And we had a very unfortunate situation once where we sadly read the death of a man with a very strange name. So there was no mistaking the name. He'd passed away. And we were all very upset he was quite a character. And then about three weeks later, I saw him in the street. And I said, I said, You do realize you're dead, don't you. And he said, no you know, in the next row to us, there was a guy with the same name. No, yeah. And I said, Oh, we can't take chances like that, so we stopped doing it. Yes.

I can see why it happens. With your local, for the Lichfield talking news is your local one. Yes. Yeah. So how often do you record locally? Do you record it all in one go? How does it work?

We record every Thursday. because the actual newspaper ceased, at the start of the pandemic, and was replaced by an online service called Lichfield live, we're able to download the news on a daily basis. So that takes pressure off on the Thursday. So we build it all up over the week. And then on a Thursday evening, we get the readers in and they read it all out. And then we make all the copies that we need to and then we get them to the post so that they can get them as quickly as possible.

So you tend to send them out, what on a Friday. Is it that quick

Some of the listeners will receive it on the Friday and the rest will receive it on the Saturday.

Wow. And how many readers do you have?

We try not to have more than four. And they come once every three weeks. So the listeners have got three separate teams that they listen to. They're all different. Almost every listener has said to me at some stage, it's such a thrill when you're walking through a supermarket talking to somebody, and a hand reaches out and says, I know your voice.

That's incredible. Gosh, those, those voices themselves become really well known to.

Yeah, yeah. Because everybody's different.

Yes. And it's so nice, actually, as well to have a variety of voices, because, you know, tuning into one voice for a long period of time can be quite umm, you know,

Each talking newspaper is different, but we took the decision not to have any one reader reading for more than about three minutes. Right. So we keep changing the subject, and we keep changing the voice. And that keeps the interest level there. Because a lot of our listeners, they're elderly, they've got their sight impaired, but a lot of them have other problems. And you need to keep that interest there. But it works.

Yeah, I bet, and if so do they come in and record in a studio near you?

What we use, we use the parish office from one of the local churches. We've been there about 35 years, they can't get rid of us.

So good. Is your audience growing? Would you say

It's growing again? Now, during the pandemic, we lost 172 listeners, and we gained none. Now, blind people are vulnerable. So their names and addresses are protected. Right. And so what happens is, there are rehabilitation officers for the blind. And there are people in most hospitals that have got a sight unit. So they know who these people are. we give them a copy of what we do. And they can actually say, are you interested in this, and then they send us their details. So during the pandemic, all home visits were knocked on the head. So the rehabilitation officers for the blind, were routed to other jobs. And they've only just started to reinstate them. And so now that they are, we're getting new listeners. Well, we've had six so far this month, we had eight last month. So under normal circumstances, in the country, right now there are 300 people a day losing their eyesight. And the vast majority of that is down to diabetes. Gosh, and, a lot of that is preventable, if people change their lifestyle. But the number had had been going down as has science improved, and so forth. And then suddenly it started to go up again because of diabetes. So this talking newspaper service around the country is vital to a growing number of people and must be maintained at whatever cost.

Yeah. That's a challenge in and of itself to the people out there, too. But there's a very specific challenge that you've got right at the moment. Am I right in talking news? Yeah, can you tell me a bit about that.

There was only one supplier of the media players that we give to the blind, which are small boxes, which can be held in one hand because a lot of people use walking sticks as well. So

you want them to be able to, to use this portably, if necessary. It would have been designed specifically for the blind so that the buttons on it were quite large. And, and they could find them just by feeling and know exactly where everything was. That supplier went out of business about four or five months ago and left us all in the lurch,

Right? Right across the country,

Every talking newspaper is now cut off from this supply. So it's a urgent job now to find an alternative supplier, we've been out and bought examples of just about every product that's on the market now that will play USB sticks. And, and the controls are so small I bought a robot for idea, which was brilliant sound, and quality and so forth. But the on off switch was so small, I struggled to find it, a blind person just wouldn't find it. So we've got to find somebody that will put the inside into a different case. And if they do that, they've got a huge captive market.

Wow. And that's mainly because it has to be bold and big enough for it to be tactile and visual, or, to help yeah,

I mean they will get dropped occasionally, so they need to be fairly sturdy. A rechargeable battery so that they don't have to keep them plugged in. We talk to every one of our listeners. And I know more than one that takes them to bed and puts it on their pillow and goes to sleep listening to the talking news.

Yeah, yeah, no, I can imagine.

So that's the big challenge. facing us all.

Yeah. So right across the country, we need to find somebody that can manufacture this quite specific USB player. Yeah, yeah. Wow. That's a challenge.

It's nice to have something to do isn't.

Oh, thank you so much, John. Absolutely fascinating to to hear about this and to hear how country wide it is. It's just incredible.

You're very welcome. And thank you for listening.

Pleasure. Thank you so much. Bye, bye.

If you feel you could help with the challenge John as mentioned in this podcast, please contact him at www.lichfieldtalkingnews.co.uk

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 Fiona and John, for talking to us about understanding the needs of their communities whilst delivering an effective community service that makes such a difference and a big thank you to you our listeners as well. Take care and goodbye.