

Stirring it up for charity

Wooden Spoon volunteer Doreen Murray talks to SUE CADE about the charity and the projects it supports in Devon

If you haven't heard of Wooden Spoon yet, it's a national charity, started up by five disconsolate rugby fans after the disastrous performance of England in the Five Nations Championship of 1983.

They were cheekily given a wooden spoon wrapped in an Irish scarf and rather than get defensive, they decided to do something good with it and help fund life-changing projects to support disadvantaged and disabled children.

Over the years, the Devon arm of Wooden Spoon has made a real difference to both high-profile and less well-known charities in the county.

"All the money raised in Devon is spent in Devon," explains Doreen, who joined as a volunteer after a friend from Budleigh became involved in car parking and bucket shaking at Exeter Chiefs matches.

While the Chiefs are an important part of fundraising efforts, with a joint Christmas lunch raising £22,000 between the Exeter Foundation and Wooden Spoon Devon, and a Q&A with Jack Nowell and Henry Slade bringing in £5,400, the charity partners with other rugby clubs too, including Teignmouth and Plymouth Albion. "We're always looking for more clubs to get involved," says Doreen.

Although rugby is the heart of the charity, there are many activities going on to raise funds.

In the summer of 2018, Doreen's husband Brian, a retired fire chief, cycled across America raising over £8,000 to split between Wooden Spoon Devon and The Fire Fighters Charity. "And we've reached a whole new audience with two recent events, a Christmas shopping event at Exeter Castle and a Superhero Training Day held at Passage House Hotel in Kingsteignton."

I comment on the vibrant striped clothing worn by Wooden Spoon members. Doreen says these are the colours of the four home nations



ABOVE: Pictures at Ellen Tinkham School, where changing rooms were funded, are Devon committee chairman Roger Haywood, Pete 'Mr England' Cross, Doreen Murray, Paddy Marsh and Mike Lock

playing at the Five Nations in 1983, which were adopted by the charity. In 2018, a beach hut in Budleigh was painted in the striking colours to promote Wooden Spoon, after the local council relaxed rules for white paint only.

Volunteers from across Devon participate in Wooden Spoon activities, and none more than Peter Cross from Dawlish, the Official RFU mascot who often parades at Twickenham. Mr England, as Pete is known, frequently attends local Wooden Spoon project handovers.

Wooden Spoon in Devon has raised an impressive £1.4 million since 2000, supporting almost 40 local children's projects. But Doreen is keen for more charities to apply for funding, especially those that don't have a particularly high profile and struggle to find funding. "It's best to get in touch with us locally to discuss an idea to check that the project qualifies, before starting the process," she suggests. ♦

To find out more visit woodenspoon.org.uk

PROJECTS IN DEVON

£15,000 helped to refurbish the sensory room at Little Bridge House, Children's Hospice South West – opened by none other than Phil Vickery

£20,000 funded new changing rooms for a hydrotherapy pool at the Ellen Tinkham Special School in Exeter.

£12,500 provided a portacabin for horse therapy charity Sirona, which provides equine therapy and educational activities to people with disabilities and young people. This particular charity might well be of interest to Wooden Spoon patron and equine fan, Princess Anne.

Funds donated to the Exeter Leukemia Fund Chevithorne Suite appeal.

More than 30 volunteers participated in the one day big build of a playground adventure trail at the Mayfield Chestnut Centre in Brixham.

Four rugby wheelchairs donated to Exeter Hawks.