



## #TeamWilder Communities in Action

### CASE STUDY: West Hull Community Hub at West Hull Amateur Rugby League Football Club

#### Tell us a bit about your group

West Hull has been an amateur rugby club in the city for 50 years. We are steeped in history, and one of the top amateur rugby league clubs in the country. We've currently got 17 teams across adult and junior leagues; each week we welcome over 350 young people from the age of 3 upwards to play the sport. We like to think that West Hull Amateur Rugby League Football Club is much more than just a rugby club though – we're based in an economically under-resourced area, with Newington & Gypsyville being the 11th most deprived ward in the whole country, so there are challenges for young people accessing sport and community spaces, due to a real lack of provision in this area.

Our children's clubs provide opportunities for kids to do a bit of sport, get support with their homework, and eat a meal. We have our warm space events where we welcome older residents each week for a shared meal and social activities, and we have a group of armed forces veterans that we also host for a weekly session, so we've got quite a lot going on!

Developing the RFL Community Wellbeing Hub is a positive step for us and our local community. We provide a space for sport, and through the Community Hub we also offer a space for people to come along, enjoy themselves, meet new friends and get involved in other activities – and we aim to make this a rich space for a really diverse population.



#### How did you get started on your #TeamWilder journey?

Initially we contacted Andy (Outer Humber Officer, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust) to enquire about putting up some bird nest boxes around the site. He came for a wander around in wintertime, and before you know it, we'd moved on from talking about nest boxes to looking at how the site is maintained, and considering how we might use our spaces differently. We talked about how the hedgerows along the fence lines are cut, why we mow the areas beyond the pitches so regularly, and then that moved into looking at how can we add something different to this space to create new opportunities for other groups of people, beyond those playing rugby. We brought our groundsmen, (who are all volunteers) into the conversation and Andy was able to help them see how making some simple changes could be a really rich thing to do. We talked about how there is a lot of greenery around here, and how we can allow that greenery to move in from around the edges, and how we could engage the local community in change, so that nature becomes part of everyday life.

This gradually became a shared vision that we all now work towards. A key thing for us is that we're striving to be much more than just a rugby league club. Since COVID and us becoming an RFL Community Wellbeing Hub, it's really transformed the way that we see our connections with the community, the opportunities that we can provide, indoors and outdoors.



### What actions have you taken for wildlife in your community and why?

One of the things that we noticed early on was that we were using lots of polystyrene cups that were going into landfill or, worse, ending up littering our site. Now we don't use polystyrene cups anymore, we use paper cups. It's kind of a small change, but it's indicative of how lots of small steps can be transformative when they are part of a wider vision.

We did a huge litter pick last year as part of the Great British Spring Clean. Many families came along and the kids were just brilliant - they loved it! The clubhouse was absolutely full of people, and it felt like a real community activity. We pledged to collect 40 bags – in the end it took the Council two truckloads to get rid of it! We're planning more of these for the future and have corporate partners who are keen to get involved and help us.

The main thing we have done for wildlife so far is to work with Andy and our volunteer groundsmen to change the way the site is managed. By cutting hedgerows on a rotational basis, rather than every year, we're allowing them to fill out and flower and fruit properly. By having more natural wavy edges to the borders rather than straight edges and mowing the areas just beyond the pitches less often, we are allowing wildflowers to come through. We've developed a woodland walk in one of our thicker perimeter hedges, so that people can wander through and enjoy the experience of being in a totally different setting and experience the wildlife that's making its home there. Andy has also helped us to develop a meadow area; here we let the grasses grow all through the summer to provide food source and habitat for insects and small mammals. We have added seating and mow pathways to allow people to explore and have fun.

From early on our plans focused on ensuring 30% of our site was functioning well for nature by 2030 and we surprised ourselves by achieving this in the first year! We are now building on this by improving the quality and variety of delivery for nature. With the current plan in place, the 30/30 concept is secured and the landscape of the sports ground has changed for all to see. Going



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### What resources or support have you used?

One of our greatest resources has been our partnerships. We've got some brilliant partners and as a community grassroots club you're nothing without your partners, because you can't be everything to everybody on your own. We work very closely with EMS Ltd and Cranswick Foods to deliver our Warm Space activities and provide the meals free of charge to everybody. This is a great way of bringing people into the Hub, and opens conversations about wellbeing, community, and nature. For us to be able to achieve what we want to achieve and have a positive, transformative impact on our community, it's important that we have these partners.

As a Community Hub we've received funding from Two Ridings Foundation, Asda, the Rank Foundation and had support from The Smile Foundation, so we're very grateful to be able to tap into the funding and support from those trusts and third sector organisations that we have here in Hull. Although in terms of our





focus on wildlife more specifically, that has not cost us a great deal at all. We've had plants and trees donated, a picnic bench donated recently by Hull City Council and are expecting some bark mulch from them soon, which will enhance our woodland walk pathways. It's amazing how much you can acquire for free when you start to build up a network of local partners! We haven't needed to spend anything really, but then you look at what we've got and it's just a lovely space.



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Our volunteer groundsmen are an invaluable human resource- the fact that they have taken on this vision and been able to see that it's a really rich thing to do has been crucial in getting us to where we are on our journey so far.

### Did you empower or involve others?

Yes, we really appreciate the significance of how we can build social and cultural capital through sport. What we encourage here is that we're all respectful of those around us, but also of the space and place – and how we use that space and place can be quite transformative in so many ways. Having a space like this means it's accessible to young people all the time; it's here for them. It doesn't 'belong to the club' as a separate entity - because together we all *are* the club. So, in everything we do we're striving to make it clear to people that they are the club, that this is their space, and that what happens here is up to them. We have a Veterans club that come here now each week, and the message is the same to them; they're here, they're part of the club now and this is their space too now, and we're hoping they'll want to bring their own ideas and energy to what we're doing to improve the site for people and for nature.



### What differences for wildlife and/or people have you noticed as a result of your actions?

A key thing for us is about awareness. It doesn't have to be massive actions, it's about regular contact with nature, small, incremental actions that inspire people and make them think differently. A lot of people in their busy, everyday lives don't even notice what's around them, but through our trips, our quizzes, the talks that Yorkshire Wildlife Trust have helped us put on, people have become really interested and engaged. They are asking questions, wanting to know more, which translates into not just 'what more can I find out' but 'what can I do about this myself?'. Working together here at the club means it's a group effort and we can all support each other.

We are seeing and hearing more nature on site now because of some of the planting we have done and especially as a result of changing the way we manage the site. We've got crickets and grasshoppers in our meadow areas now all through the summer. Our tree planting around the edges of that area is increasing habitat for birds; we have blackcaps, whitethroats, sparrows, and finches singing from that area as I write!

This is not about us trying to cajole people to take action. We have a lot of people who use the Community Hub who can't 'take action' in a physical sense – and that's fine. Our core volunteers are taking action regularly, some of our Community Hub regulars are taking action at our community events, as are the groups who we invite along to events such as Welcome to English and local primary school children; they are taking action in ways that fit with their interests and abilities and that's amazing to see. For others it's more about becoming more aware of nature in their everyday lives, and we feel that in some ways that's just as important as the physical things that happen on site.

### How has this made you feel?

There have been many positives which have come out of the work we have done. We have built some fabulous partnerships, wonderful friendships, and worked with groups who perhaps as a rugby club we would not naturally have worked with. Opening our eyes to wildlife and the world around us has been really important for the many different people who use the space, and it has proved that no space is a barrier to engaging with nature. On a personal note, I am really proud of what has been achieved to date, although I acknowledge there is still a lot more we can do, and indeed hope to do.

Working with colleagues, and now friends, at Yorkshire Wildlife Trust has been a great journey and we have all challenged each other's assumptions and positions in a really productive way- which has enabled us to make great progress in what started out as a vision to put a few bird boxes up along our perimeter fence!

### Did you face any challenges or barriers in taking your action for wildlife? If so, what were these?

What we're doing here is quite new in the context of a sports club, certainly in this region, and we are bound to make some mistakes along the way, but for us so far it's been about opening the club's eyes to different things; we haven't had to massively change the way we do things, but what we have done is start to change a few mindsets and broaden horizons. The challenges are often about getting people outside because of age and mobility, which is why we do the trips, talks, quizzes etc – to make nature relevant and accessible to all.

### What have been your favourite nature moments or encounters with wildlife whilst doing this?

Seeing the difference it makes to the children when they get out into nature. We had one little guy who was struggling somewhat, and I took him for a walk around and asked, 'what could you do out here do you think?' He had a think and said 'Oh, I'd do some meditation. I could bring my friends and we could do some mindfulness.' That is the absolute last thing I expected to come out of this little guy's mouth! And then he started to talk about the stuff that he's been doing at science in school and his interests, so that was a really rich moment.

Another example was on a session we had somebody in the group with a visual impairment- they could see directly in front of them but little beyond that, but they had very good hearing. We had Andy supporting the group, but as he's of a certain age, he couldn't hear our grasshoppers. So, this person used his hearing to guide Andy towards the grasshoppers, and then when Andy could see them, he was able to get down and catch one and hold it up close to show it to this person, and that was the first time they'd ever seen a grasshopper. So, between them, using their two different senses, they were able to catch and observe this creature, and that that was just a really rich moment. It's moments like that that remind us why we do this work. And yeah, I'm sure there'll be lots more to come for a lot of those kids coming here that don't otherwise get access to this type of space for whatever reason.

### What do you plan to do next?

As an RFL Community Wellbeing Hub we're part of a community of practice, so we're linking with clubs from Leeds, Salford, and St Helens to spread the word, build relationships and encourage people from across the RFL to visit us and see what's possible.

We're looking now at the next phase in our development and asking ourselves 'how do we have even more impact?' We're all volunteers with limited capacity, but we're exploring what the next stage of our journey looks like. I'm conscious that in the school holidays we'll have some kids that will come down and kick a ball about, but we've got this massive space, we've got a brilliant wildlife area- how can we best use that? How can we maximize that, so there's something else for kids to do over the summer – that's what we're currently working on and planning for.

If others are thinking of doing something similar, then we're here - come and pay us a visit! Doing something positive for nature on your site doesn't have to be hard. You can go to what extent you want to go to. It doesn't cost a great deal. We've got a large space that's safe, but projects don't necessarily have to be on the scope and scale that we've got here, it can be at whatever scale your site and capacity allows. It's just thinking differently about how you use your space. The first thing to do is sit down and look around you, because that's how it started, really- just stop and listen. Then, when you've become more attuned to what you have, you can start to think about how to make it better for wildlife and better for people and when you start making that change, you'll soon see- it's a really rich thing to do.

### Contact us or find out more:

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