



Environmental Campaigner Carrie Cort on Our Global Challenge

The efforts of Carrie Cort, founder of Sussex Green Living and co-founder of the Horsham Repair Café, were recognised at the Energy Efficiency South East Awards 2018.

Already, her family has been named as Britain's greenest, resulting in an interview with *The Telegraph*.

Here, Carrie talks about effect of *Blue Planet*, the fight against plastic and highlights how we can all contribute to a cleaner world...

How did you become Britain's greenest family?

We received this accolade at the P E A (People, Environment, Achievement) Awards. We could of course live greener lives, by sleeping in hammocks in the woods. But the panel liked the fact that we're a normal family, living in a normal house, yet we demonstrate small ways to make

a difference and try to inspire others too. My son, Adam, is promotes green living at his school, while my mum, Jean Francis, is a OneSpirit inter-faith minister, promoting environmentally friendly ceremonies for weddings and funerals. Some families bury their head in the sand when it comes to environment as they think they're too busy, whereas we try to make a difference.

In what way can you make a difference?

I trained as a West Sussex County Council waste prevention adviser, on a voluntary basis. Following that, I founded *Sussex Green Living*, which was launched on Earth Day in 2012. After Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, he set up a climate change leadership programme and I trained under him. Initially, my

focus was on children. I organised waste prevention and recycling talks. As well as working with schools, I spoke to Scouts and Guides groups, as well as other youth groups.

How do you make the subject interesting for children?

In all honesty, children are not the problem! They're fully aware of what is happening to the planet. But for a bit of fun, Adam did have the idea of building a robot.



Carrie (right) was named Energy Efficiency Champion at the South East Awards



Are we committed to recycling?

In February, West Sussex County Council issued a press release headlined 'Recycling Our Way to Success.' But in truth, our statistics are not impressive. Our county's recycling rate rose from 41.6% in 2014/15 to 42.3% in 2015/16. But that's below the national average and some way behind the nation's best recyclists. South Oxfordshire achieved a devilishly impressive 66.6%, with seven other councils

hitting above 60%. Despite its apparent affluence, Horsham District currently only recycles 43% of its waste. HDC is trying to hit the 50% target set by the Government by 2020. The move to fortnightly collections for general waste may boost the figure. If the council fails to meet its target, it could face fines, which may potentially one day lead to penalties for homeowners who do not recycle properly.

"Blue Planet has created a movement against plastic, as it highlighted the pollution in our oceans."

Together, we made *Bottletop Bob*, which was a big box that children could climb in. Bob illustrates the various kinds of bottle tops you can collect. Now, we also have *Ronnie the Recycled Robot* and *Landfill Larry*. They all illustrate the household items that can be recycled. At *Funday Sunday* in Horsham, we held a competition to encourage children to make 'eco beasts' and we've also sold items made from recycled or upcycled materials. I've made carrier bags from toothpaste tubes and pencil cases from crisp packets. Such items ask the question: *Is this trash or treasure?*

Are we largely ignorant of the environmental issues we face?

A huge percentage of the population has forgotten that everything around us comes from our planet. It's not magically being made and it hasn't come from outer space; it's come from the materials Earth gives us. Too many people buy things and let the council worry about disposal, and only relate to recycling when there's a financial impact, as was the case with plastic bags.

Are plastics becoming the key focus of 'green' campaigners?

Britain has a problem in that, in the past, a significant amount of our 'hard plastic' waste was exported to China. They used it to make cheap products which are

shipped all over the world. In one sense, it was good that China was using recycled plastic rather than petroleum. However, the impact of transporting this plastic to China, then having China send its items straight back to Europe, is huge. Now, the government in China has banned importation of our plastic waste and we have the problem of what to do with it.

What are your thoughts on incinerators?

We have a Mechanical Biological Treatment Plant, operated by *Biffa West Sussex Ltd* at the landfill site in Warnham. The treatment plant aims to reduce the volume of waste going to landfill. An incinerator would ensure that anything that can't be recycled is used to generate electricity. My heart says they're not a good thing, as we should be doing all we can to recycle. However, it doesn't make sense to keep shipping plastics all over the world.

Could we live without plastic?

There is going to be a need for plastic to a degree, because of the number of people occupying Earth and the sheer number of uses it serves. We need food with a long shelf life to prevent a huge amount of food waste. However, whilst it's difficult to totally rid the world of plastic, we need a transition towards plastics that use less petroleum.



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'Britain's greenest family' at their home in Coneyhurst

Adam Cort, 10

"I loved watching *Blue Planet*, as it made me think about how I could help.

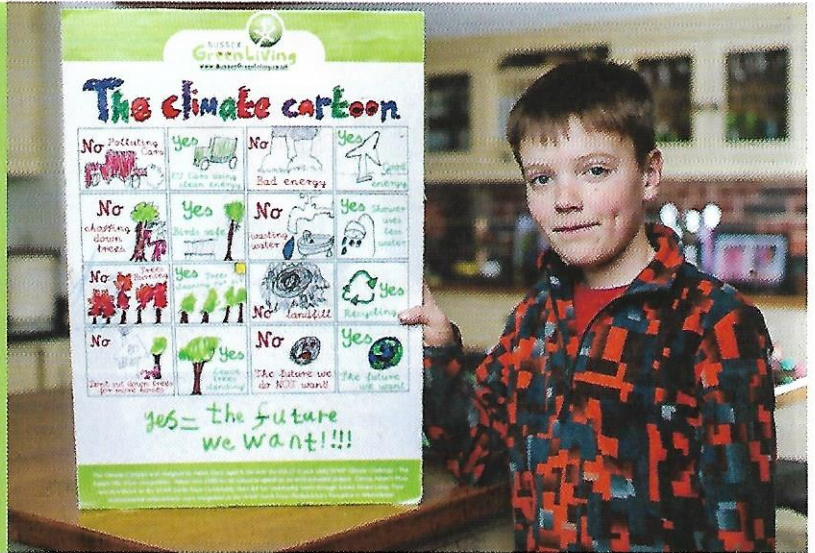
In the episode about pollution, they said that the amount of plastic in the sea would outweigh the fish it contains by 2050.

I've made things at home and at my school, William Penn in Coolham, to give people ideas for greener lives.

People can switch to electric cars, stop leaving the tap on

while brushing their teeth, and only boil the water they need when making tea or coffee.

I was given a *WWF Climate Challenge Award* for a poster I made, describing ways to make the world a greener place. I went to Westminster soon after and met Horsham MP Jeremy Quin. He was okay, although I would do more for the environment if I was in government."



Did Blue Planet make a difference?

Yes - and Hallelujah for David Attenborough and the BBC. *Blue Planet* created a significant movement against plastic, as it highlighted pollution in our oceans. I give assemblies at schools and, since January, we've been talking about climate change. Even mentioning *Blue Planet* gets their attention. We need to promote the message that we all need to live greener lives, otherwise our children have a pretty diabolical future. The great thing about children is that they get it and encourage parents to make changes at home. Children understand that what we are doing is illogical. With programmes like *Sussex Green Living*, we inspire green champions of the future and ensure the next generation has a better outlook.

What can we do to help?

We're one of many people to have switched to an electric or hybrid car, powered by solar panels installed at home. However, small steps can make a difference too. You can switch back to milk bottles. We worked out that we were buying 80 four-litre cartons of milk each year. You're also paying for them to be recycled by the council. Multiply that by the number of people in the country, and the impact is massive. The alternative is to have six glass bottles of milk delivered each week, which are then collected, washed and sterilized, ready for use again. I'm glad that the milkman is making a comeback!

Should we all install solar panels?

That's not possible for every property and it can be an expensive initial outlay. However, we can all buy energy saving bulbs, or switch to a renewable green energy supplier. People don't realise that the electricity still comes to them via the National Grid! But by backing a 100% renewable energy provider, rather

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Customer Testimonial

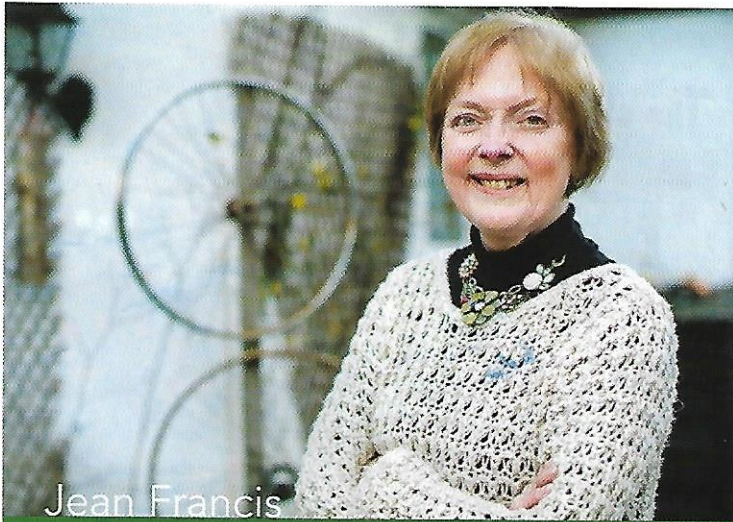
"We are really happy with the blinds; thank you. The Romans are gorgeous, the fabric is good quality and they really look great. The conservatory blinds make the conservatory cosy - another room rather than just a conservatory that rarely gets used!"

Linda Claridge, Horsham

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Jean Francis

Jean Francis is a *OneSpirit* Interfaith minister/celebrant. This enables her to respect people of all faiths and none, holding the view that there are many paths to one truth. Jean organises wedding blesses, funerals and baby naming services. "As a *OneSpirit* Interfaith minister, I have an open approach to spirituality that embraces the truth of all faiths

or none. Together, we can create ceremonies around what is important to you, whether your ideas are traditional, alternative or a fusion of both. A green burial is the most natural way of re-cycling a body. Human remains return to the Earth, soon to become part of the cycle of nature." circleoflifecelebrations.co.uk

"If we all lived like Americans, we would need five planets' worth of resources."

than one of the main providers, you're investing in green companies. They can be competitive with rates, and switching is so easy to do.

Is there any local assistance?

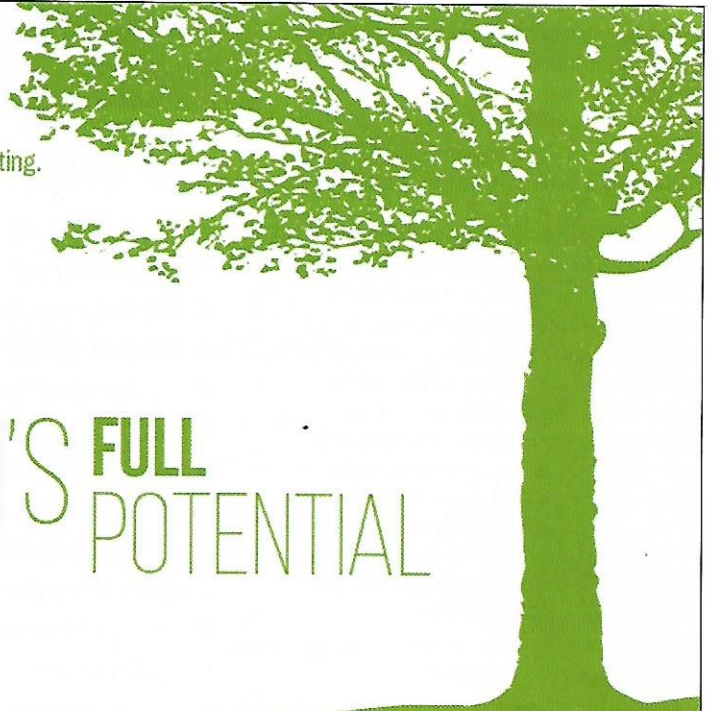
You'll find information and tips on the *Sussex Green Living* site. We also have Horsham Repair Café, which I co-founded with Jill Shuker, a great friend of mine. We offer a free monthly repair service for broken or worn out items. We're partnered with Horsham Quakers, which for years has operated a bottle refill service. We've just held the fifth repair café and have covered everything from clothing to electronic repairs. The idea is to promote all the 'R' words: recycle, reuse, remake and repair.

Are we good at recycling as a county?

We don't have brilliant statistics and I don't really know why. Some of the surrounding counties are doing better than West Sussex. Certainly, in Surrey they have different coloured bins for various recyclable items. It's initially complicated, but it might be that separating more plastics leads to less landfill. All I can do is continue to remind people that it's all from our planet. There are 7.5 billion people on Earth and if we all lived like Americans, we would need five planets' worth of resources for the amount we take every year. If we all lived like Europeans, we would need three planets' worth. But, of course, we only have one planet. Sadly, those in developing



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Carrie with Pedro, the Sussex Green Living mascot and (right) bottle recycling

countries are most affected by climate change, yet are less guilty of causing it.

What other issues do we face regarding the environment?

My current campaign is on the fashion industry, which is a major polluter. Clothes are made very cheaply in countries like Bangladesh, India and China, then travel thousands of miles to reach us. We then quickly throw these garments out, usually at a textiles recycling point. But most of it ends up in Africa, so the carbon footprint of these cheap T-shirts is ludicrous. It takes 2,700 litres of water to grow enough cotton to make a T-shirt, which is enough water for one person for two years. Yet, most are made in countries which suffer from water shortages! We have this 'fast fashion' mentality where people don't think about its origins.

Isn't it expensive to live a greener lifestyle?

The more people who get



involved, the cheaper it will become. As uptake of solar panels increased, prices came down. The same will happen with things like the milk round, as supermarkets won't be able to continue taking advantage of dairy farmers. If we all work together, we will all benefit!

INTERVIEWS: BEN MORRIS
PICTURES: TOBY PHILLIPS



Find more information on recycling at

www.SussexGreenLiving.co.uk or www.HorshamRepairCafe.org.uk

For a list of items that can be recycled, visit <https://www.horsham.gov.uk/bins/recycling/recycled-materials>

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