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April 2021

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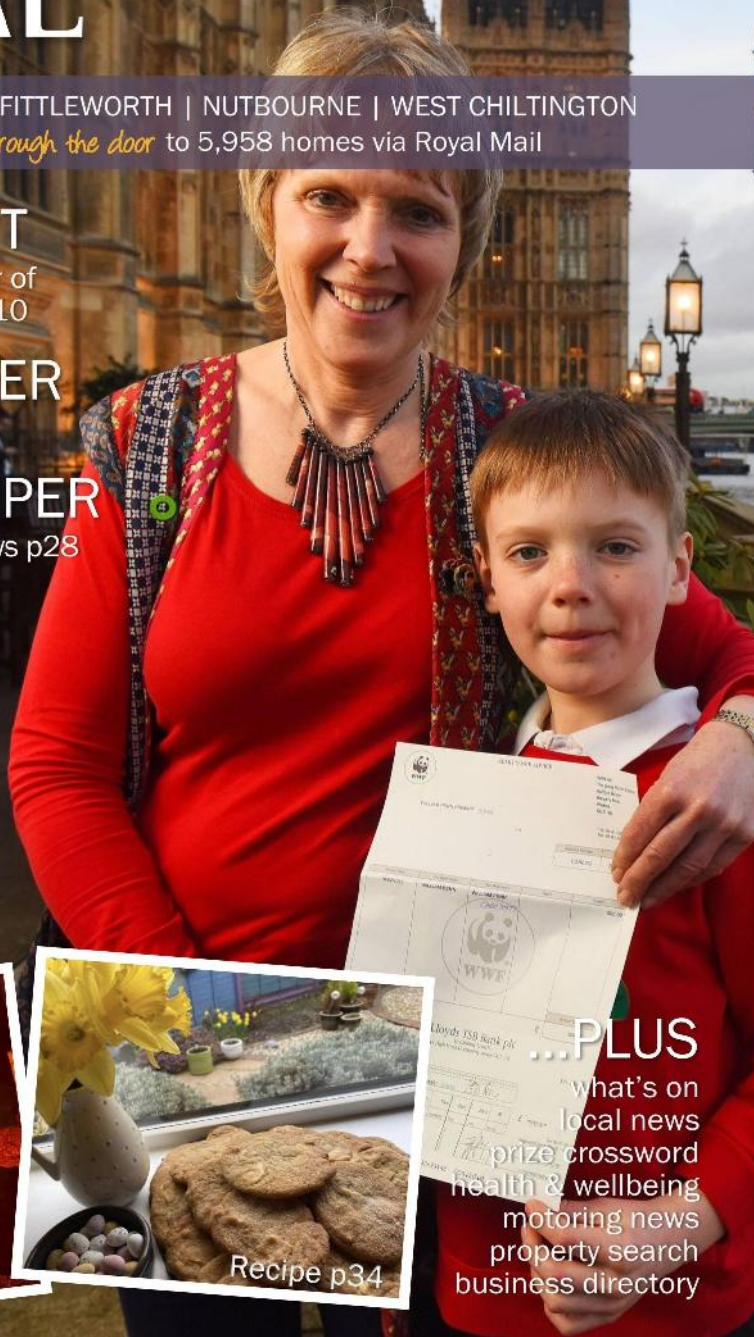
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# Carrie Cort: A woman on a mission

To inspire sustainable living. By Keir Hartley

This year's UN Climate Summit and President Biden's new initiatives may help. But if we're really going to make a difference on climate change, it's the tireless work of grassroots activists like Carrie Cort, Chief Executive of Sussex Green Living, which will carry the day. To find out what it's like at the sharp end, we spoke to Carrie.

Carrie Cort is a woman on a mission. A quest which saw her give up a prestigious job and throw herself into a new life as an environmental campaigner. The ripples of her decision are still spreading outwards across much of South East England.

Ten years ago it was all very different. She was the Director of a successful communications company in Horsham. Many of the clients were in things like education and the environment but perhaps it was the arrival of her son, Adam, that prompted what she called her three "lightbulb moments".

"I saw Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth*" she says. "Then there was the work of my friend Nicola Peel, who lives in the next village." Nicola is a



Carrie and son Adam at WWF Community Hero Awards reception

writer and filmmaker who campaigns tirelessly on environmental issues. Finally, "I've brought a child into this world, I love the countryside." It was time to do something.

At first the sheer scale of the environmental crisis depressed her. But "I felt it's either depression or into action. I reasoned I had marketing skills, I will do all I can in my power to help."

Carrie began by undertaking an extensive programme of training in environmental awareness. Some was with Gore himself as part of his network of Climate Reality Leaders. Then: "I started doing this as a night job while still doing a four-day week at my company." 'This' being Sussex Green Living (SGL), a thriving network of groups which does just about anything you can think of to do with opposing environmental degradation and global warming. There is a climate change café, where issues are thrashed out in lively discussions. There is also an amazing repair workshop where people can bring along almost anything to be repaired and avoid buying new. Above all, there is a rolling programme of education, awareness and talks, to anyone who wants to learn.

Schools, faith-based groups and community associations are all taking speakers and programmes from SGL. If you are running a community day in Sussex, chances are Carrie or other members of SGL will be there, with something for all the family. If you are a teacher with an afternoon to fill, the SGL website is a trove of activities and resources.

Of course, Covid has put some of this into cold storage, or onto Zoom. But SGL are resilient and we can expect a strong comeback as restrictions lift. Their latest acquisition is an electric milk float, ▶



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which SGL copped just before it went for scrap. Carrie and the team will drive it round the county giving fun advice on greener lifestyles, sustainable energy and cleaner environments.

Gradually, SGL's message is being taken up by voluntary groups all over the south, including Chichester, Dorking and Worthing. The group is embedded in a diverse network of formal organisations such as green energy companies, wildlife trusts, local government and media. All are in the SGL contact book or are actively working with them. A key partner is South East Climate alliance, giving Carrie instant access to advice and resources whenever a problem comes up.

Carrie notices that different activities attract different sorts of people. "There are clearly identifiable groups who are not all the same types. For example, Climate café is for hard core climate activists," she says. The make-up of the repair café is rather more diverse. "We have attracted a certain type of person who wants nothing to do with dump or landfill. Some are climate activists. Some members don't like the whole idea of built-in obsolescence. Some are keen to de-plasticise." Clearly, they are people who might not normally bump up against one another but, "we come back buzzing from the repair café. It's a shining



Carrie Cort

example of a community coming together to create something quite magical." Bringing different people together is fun-but it's also the start of real social change. The café is now much copied, while initiatives like youth forums are reaching younger demographics.

Making people aware of the issues is still a problem for the whole environmental movement. Carrie has ten years' experience of it. SGL cuts through well to people "who are sitting comfortably in life" and to primary school children, who are now being thoroughly educated on all the different issues. With older kids, the response is mixed. Some get it at once. Some don't seem to notice, although Greta Thunberg seems to have had some effect. Another problem is reaching people who are economically struggling. Long hours of work mean that they don't have time to look at bigger issues. Their opportunities to change the things they buy are limited by poverty. However, the key demographic in changing any society is probably "mums." Carrie knows why they are sometimes hard to reach. "Because they are super, super busy". This is where Sussex Green Living's programme of education for schools and family events comes in. Mums and kids frequently attend together, and it's surprising what the effects of a safe learning space can be for everyone. There are set backs too, especially with retired people. Some understand, but "some have lost sight of the issue. We went to six retirement communities and it was not as positive as we had hoped" she admits ruefully.

Above all Carrie believes that a successful outcome will depend on sending a positive message. The pandemic and the economic recession have caused soaring levels of poverty and psychological depression. Just telling people how bad things are won't work. "If we are all gloom and doom, they won't listen, but if we can visualise a good future they will know where to go." "People find it easier if they are on a journey with other people."



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◀ [www.SussexGreenLiving.co.uk](http://www.SussexGreenLiving.co.uk) is a multi-award winning growing charity offering many climate mitigation solutions, including how to adopt an environmentally friendly lifestyle. Within the website you will also find information on:

Horsham Future Forum a collection of local groups and people network on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday each month 7.00pm–8.00pm sharing ideas, events and some short talks with a local focus.

Youth Eco Forum local young environmentalists 11+ years meet every other Sunday at 6pm, for an hour of planet-friendly chat.

Inspiration Eco-Station (IES) A retrofitted milk float bringing an inspiring display and solutions to help you reduce your impact on the planet (as soon as covid allows).

Work in Schools free lessons by Carrie Cort, founder of Sussex Green Living, currently using Zoom or the schools preferred communication software.

[www.HorshamRepairCafe.org.uk](http://www.HorshamRepairCafe.org.uk) offering repairs, bottle refills (household cleaning and personal hygiene products) and energy advice and switching. The physical cafe is closed at present, but they still advise on repairs over Zoom.

[www.HorshamClimateCafe.org.uk](http://www.HorshamClimateCafe.org.uk) topical event



Feb 2020 Horsham Repair Cafe also offers free energy cost comparisons

on the 1st Saturday of each month at 2pm-3.30pm with a speaker or two, followed by questions, answers and discussions.

[www.BigCleanSwitch.org/SussexGreen](http://www.BigCleanSwitch.org/SussexGreen) Help with switching to a green energy supplier.

[www.SEClimateAlliance.uk](http://www.SEClimateAlliance.uk) a coalition of local environmental, community and faith groups from the South East uniting for urgent action on climate change.



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