

Be the change you wish to see...

The Lions Young Ambassador programme recognises and encourages young people (aged 15-18) who are actively involved in helping others.

The four Young Ambassadors who share their stories in this feature are an inspiration. Through their passion for a particular cause, they are making an impressive difference.

The programme operates throughout Europe and enables individual Lions, Leo or Lioness clubs to identify and sponsor a Young Ambassador from within their local community.

Young people who share Lions Clubs' service ethos can be found around the British Isles. Entrants may be sought through schools, youth organisations, coverage in media/social media, or among those participating in Lions Young Leaders in Service initiative, for example.

With the support of their sponsoring club, the most inspiring candidates progress to represent eight districts at a national event. This is a fun – and busy – weekend where the finalists are invited to share their story, participate in social activities, and enjoy an awards presentation.

Each of the finalist receives a £500 bursary to be used for welfare work on their chosen project, or for training to help them in this work.

The overall winner becomes the Young Ambassador for Lions Clubs International of the British Isles. They are presented with a further £1,000, a trophy, the opportunity during the year to promote their project, and invited to take part in a European grand final.

Get involved with the 2020/21 Young Ambassador programme. See details on page 10.

“Because often knowing someone understands is enough.”

ABI HUTCHINSON

Inclusion changes people

and is changing the world

for the better.

JEMIMA BROWNING

Never be ashamed of
BEING DIFFERENT:
it is this difference
that makes you
extraordinary
and unique.

SIENA CASTELLON

**Through experiences
in life, every young
person develops
passions and
interests to help
others.**

THEO BIDDLE

I have an interest in supporting the bereavement services at Shakespeare Hospice due to my own experience. When I was 14 my dad passed away very suddenly and I struggled with the idea of getting professional help. I felt that my feelings were too personal and embarrassing to voice and I knew that none of my friends at the time had any similar experiences, so it was hard for them to understand. My involvement with volunteering and charity work started when I was 16 and I began helping at the Shakespeare Hospice in Stratford. I loved being able to support such an important cause and the hospice allowed me to reach other charities such as Warwickshire young carers – which I otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to do.



Shakespeare Hospice realised there is a lack of engagement among teenagers when it comes to bereavement services. I had an idea to make bereavement services fun and exciting, without pressure to talk about personal feelings.

I'm setting up a new group to run fun activities, such as visiting theme parks, hosting movie nights and general meet ups, to bring those in a similar situation together. My hope is that these teens will form friendships and have a support system to fall back on, should they ever need one.

I want to allow these friendships to be as organic as possible without forcing any sort of conversation about bereavement, because often knowing that someone understands is enough.

The project will be fairly self-maintaining after initial set up. Teenagers can provide suggestions for the activities they would like to do next. They may even choose to meet up with the friends they have made outside of the project.

I'd like these teens to go into schools and promote the group. They can encourage new members but also raise awareness and understanding among teens who have been bereaved, but are not ready to come to a group. This will help those around them to be more understanding and supportive.

Abigail Hutchinson

Young Ambassador
Winner 2020

Sponsoring club:
Shakespeare Lions



I am a neurodiversity advocate who is passionate about changing stereotypes and misconceptions about autistic people and people with learning differences. I am autistic, dyslexic and dyspraxic and have ADHD.

Disappointed at discovering that online resources were focused on supporting parents of autistic children and children with learning differences, when I was 13 years old I created www.QLmentoring.com. This is a website to mentor and support students with learning disabilities and autistic students. My Twitter account [@QLMentoring](https://twitter.com/QLMentoring) has over 6,000 followers.

In 2018, I launched Neurodiversity Celebration Week (NC Week) to encourage schools to shift from only focusing on the challenges and difficulties of their students with special educational needs to also recognising their strengths and talents.

Following on, I created a website – www.Neurodiversity-Celebration-Week.com – which has free resources and information for teachers and schools that helps them to better understand and support their neurodiverse students.

In March 2020, over 750 schools and over half a million students took part in NC Week across the UK, Australia and USA. Organisations such as The Alan Turing Institute, the Natural History Museum, the University of Edinburgh and London's City Hall also participated.

Growing up, I was unable to find any books written specifically for autistic girls. So, I decided to change this by writing the type of book I wished I could have benefited from during my tricky teenage years.

In March 2020, The Spectrum Girl's Survival Guide: How to Grow Up Awesome and Autistic was launched and is now a bestseller. It's an uplifting book, full of practical advice and information that addresses the unique challenges that autistic teen girls face and empowers autistic girls to embrace who they are.

I ran a successful crowdsourcing campaign in April 2020 that raised enough funds for a copy of my book to be given to every girl's state secondary school in the UK.

When I was growing up I felt different to everyone else, I also felt very misunderstood. Frequently bullied and ostracised at school. Instead of addressing the behaviour of the bullies, I was to blame.

My teachers would tell me that I should try harder to fit in and that I only had myself to blame, because I was so odd and eccentric. As a consequence, the bullying often escalated and became so intolerable that I had to move schools several times. The constant cruelty at the hands of my classmates made me begin to think that I was unlikeable.

Being diagnosed with autism when I was 12 was a huge relief. Finally I had an explanation as to why I was so different to everyone else and could begin the journey towards accepting and embracing who I am.

My experience motivated me to make a difference so that future autistic students have a more positive school experience than mine.

Siena Castellon

Young Ambassador
Winner 2019

Sponsoring club:
Fairlop Lions

I have a long-held passion to ensure young people feel empowered, ready to make change for the future and have the opportunity to do anything they set their minds to. This makes me determined to do whatever I can to positively affect this.

My wish is to improve the lives of those with disabilities and additional needs by helping break down barriers in the mainstream world. I truly believe everyone with a disability should have every opportunity that people without disabilities are given.

I decided that if the world was not going to create opportunities for people like my brother, Will, it was down to me to make changes. So I set up Tadcaster Stingrays when I was 15 years old.

Tadcaster Stingrays is open to young people aged between 11 and 18 with learning and physical disabilities. The club is all about inclusion and promoting sport for all. It is an opportunity for young people to gain a sense of belonging and be proud members of a group. We pride ourselves on training together as a team.

I am so happy to have the squad up and running and feel enormously privileged to be their coach, experiencing first-hand the amazing steps the young people make and how much fun they have together.

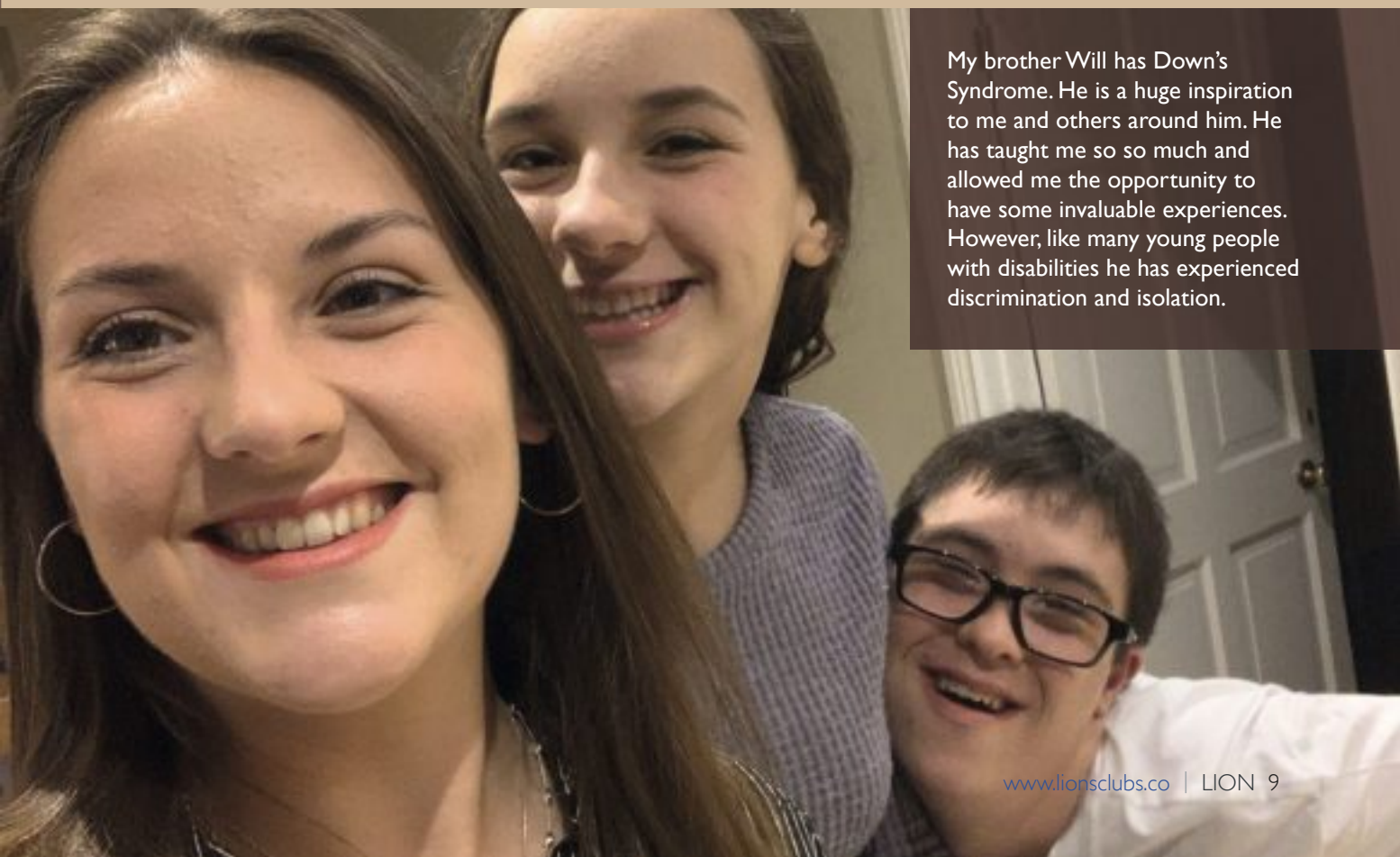
The club has grown to 17 swimmers. The inclusive ideas behind Stingrays are shining through everything we do and give the young people something which previously has been limited by lack of opportunity.

I've gone on to work with Youth Sport Trust and Special Olympics. My brother and I sit on the European and British board and use our projects to make the world a more inclusive place.

Jemima Browning
Young Ambassador
Winner 2018

Sponsoring club:
Selby Lions

 PHOTO: JEMIMA BROWNING, SISTER, TABBY AND BROTHER, WILL



My brother Will has Down's Syndrome. He is a huge inspiration to me and others around him. He has taught me so so much and allowed me the opportunity to have some invaluable experiences. However, like many young people with disabilities he has experienced discrimination and isolation.

Dreams are possibilities...



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The Lions Clubs Young Ambassador Shipshape Award provides a life changing adventure at sea for one of the Young Ambassador finalists. Its purpose is for the recipient to develop their leadership skills by joining a crew of young people with a range of abilities aboard one of the Jubilee Sailing Trust tall ships.



Theo Biddle
Young Ambassador Shipshape
Award Winner 2020

Sponsoring club:
Castleford & Pontefract Lions

My passion for what I do comes from my mum – homeless at age 14 she relied on charities to help her through. This is why my project supports children with free school meals during school holidays, and provides a network of support, advice and a community hub with access to hot meals. My £500 bursary bought a fridge freezer so we can help even more people in my town.

I'm grateful to the Lions for the advice, friendship and experiences I've been given, which have helped boost my confidence. The Young Ambassador programme is a great catalyst and by taking part, Lions Clubs can help young people further the work of charities and projects to make other people's lives better.

Get involved with the 2020/21 Young Ambassador programme.

The 2020/21 Young Ambassador programme is open from June to October. Entrants must be between 15 and 19 years of age at 30 June 2021.

Lions, Leo or Lioness Clubs interested in taking part in this year's Young Ambassador programme should contact their District officer for advice and support.

From October, Districts will choose a Young Ambassador from the successful club candidates to progress to the national final. This celebratory weekend event takes place in February.

The 2021 Young Ambassador for the British Isles will be invited to attend the European grand final in October.

For further information on entering the programme email: enquiries@lionsclubs.co