Drew Richardson joins River Action

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We're thrilled to introduce Drew Richardson, our new Communities Coordinator, who will be joining our growing Communities Team at River Action. In our latest blog, we get to know more about Drew and the role that he will play to help rescue Britain's rivers.

Q1. Tell us about yourself

Hello, my name's Drew and I've just joined River Action's Communities Team as a Community Coordinator. I studied Freshwater and Marine Biology at university before starting a career in the charity sector. I've worked for environmental charities, set up and managed York's Volunteer Centre, secured over half a million pounds of investment into our local health and care system, and managed a squadron of Stormtroopers, an Ewok, and R2D2!

I live in Yorkshire and spend my free time renovating, volunteering, reading, and getting out into nature whenever I can.

Q2. How did you become interested in river protection?

I've always enjoyed wild swimming. Living in mid-Wales for 10 years I was lucky enough to have a local walk with a rarely trod path that allowed me to swim in a section of the Ystwyth between two waterfalls; it felt like my own hidden oasis. This love of the water led to my studying Freshwater and Marine Biology at University where I really started to learn about the dangers to our rivers. Having moved to Yorkshire a few years ago, I've become really aware of the lack of clean wild swimming spots and it feels like that escape, that ability to literally immerse myself in nature, has been cut off to me. I want to restore our rivers so everyone can enjoy the benefits that they bring again.

Q3. You have spent your career working in the third sector. What have you enjoyed most about in this sector and what have been its biggest challenges?

The thing I enjoy most about working in the charity sector is everyone you work with is passionate about what they do in a way that just isn't comparable when you're working for someone's profits. I spend the majority of my waking life working, so I want to use that time to leave the world in a better state than it was, and work around people with the same ethos. The biggest challenges I've seen are the increasing demand on charities, a decrease in funding, and fatigue. We're so exposed to all the woes of the world, and simply don't have the capacity to be experts in every cause and fight every battle, so it can be overwhelming. I just try to focus on a few causes I can throw my whole self into, and trust that others will do the same for those fights I can't champion.

Q4. You are also a trustee for the Charity, Time to be Out. Tell us more about the charity and the role you play to support their work.

Time To Be Out supports people who have had to flee from their own country because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We support people throughout every stage of their claim in hopes that they can move on from past trauma and build a life as an openly LGBT+ person for the first time.

As a Trustee my role on the board is to make sure our charity is compliant with the law, that we use our resources for the most benefit, and that we tactfully navigate the current climate towards those seeking asylum. As a micro-charity with no staff though, I do get stuck in with operational responsibilities too, like checking in on our clients. Whilst we are small, we punch way above our weight, and were even awarded Small Charity of the Year 2023 Finalist at the Third Sector Awards.

Q5. Tell us about your new role as Communities Coordinator at River Action…what can we expect to see from your role in 2024 and beyond?

Initially I'll be working with community groups to ensure all their voices are brought together in our upcoming March for Clean Water so that their local campaigns are highlighted at a national level. Soon we'll be launching our River Rescue Kit to support local community groups to have the maximum impact, wherever they are in their journey. So I'm looking forward to helping groups to use that kit and see what exciting things they can achieve with it. As the Communities team has

grown, I’m particularly looking forward to meeting and working with groups we might not have met or had much involvement with yet, especially in the north. I’m excited to see what we can achieve together.

Q6. Finally, in your opinion, what is further needed/what needs to change to rescue Britain’s rivers?

It’s such an exciting time to be joining River Action, with many new MPs being elected with local rivers in their manifestos, with rivers being mentioned in the King’s Speech, and river pollution being such a prominent part of the national discourse. It feels like there is a lot of potential for change, we just need to work to make sure that potential is realised. At the moment, water companies and the agriculture industry can get away with polluting our rivers; it’s cheaper and easier for them, so there is no motivation for them to change. We need that to change so polluting is just not worth the risk which means we need empowered regulators that can hold polluters to account effectively and that takes a change from the government. What we need to do is continue to support community groups with their local campaigns, and to collect data as citizen scientists, so we can keep the public informed, keep river health in the public consciousness, and show the government they have a mandate from the people they represent to make impactful change.