

Leon Wilkinson at Clifton Park, Rotherham

Thanks to National Lottery players £34million is raised each week for projects helping to change people's lives. Leon Wilkinson is a horticulture volunteer at the Lottery-funded Clifton Park in Rotherham and it has had a really positive impact on his life.

25 year-old Leon Wilkinson has been living with severe anxiety since he was a young child and as a result struggled to communicate. This made doing the everyday things in life that many of us take for granted really difficult, like ordering in a café, shopping and socialising.

Supported by his occupational therapist, in 2013 Leon began a volunteering position at the walled garden in Clifton Park, recently restored with National Lottery money. When Leon first arrived he found it hard to interact with other volunteers and could only work for very short periods before wanting to go home. Today, the change in Leon is dramatic – quite simply, working at the garden has changed his life.

Leon has grown in confidence, he is managing his anxiety and he is talking more and able to live a fuller life. In fact, Leon can now undertake tasks such as ordering hot drinks in a café, which he couldn't do before.

Leon believes the positive change is thanks to his work at the park with the support of the local gardening team.

Leon said: "Working at the Clifton Park has really changed my life. Before, I used to dread meeting people, as my nervousness would get the better of me. Today, I'm so much happier when I'm in the garden, getting my hands dirty and

without the National Lottery money for the park, it wouldn’t have been possible.”

Clifton Park transformed

Clifton Park is Rotherham's premier green space, occupying a 56 acre site surrounding Clifton Park Museum, which opened in 1891. Thanks to £4.5million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund, the park underwent a major restoration in 2008 to restore its historic features including the Memorial Garden, Cenotaph, Memorial Rock Garden and walled garden. Improvements were also made to the main pedestrian routes in the park, and original paths such as the Scarp walk. A purpose built Garden House and restored bandstand are amongst the other facilities that visitors and community groups now enjoy.

Huge thanks to Leon and the team at Clifton Park for their incredible work which is bringing people across Rotherham together.

Join us on Twitter today to celebrate the difference Lottery players have made to the UK’s parks and gardens. #ThankYouThursday.