

SpecTrek

"In the early years the specs, collected from Lions Clubs throughout District 105D, were taken to Weymouth Lions who moved them on to the Missionary Optical Society who were based in Cornwall. The Society then graded and packed them before dispatch to Africa and Asia.

Later, Weymouth lost the services of their "sorter", due to failing eyesight, so we then (with the help of Fareham Lions) took all the specs to a storage site (largely made up of old shipping containers) near Eastleigh. The provider of the store then passed them on to the Society.

A few years back the owner of the Eastleigh store went out of business and very rapidly, we had to find somewhere else for our, by then, 50000 plus pairs of specs. Also, by this time the Missionary Optical Society was no longer in the business.

Chichester Lions had been running a nationwide collection using Parcel force for some time, and we contacted them. Brilliantly, they were able to help, although our specs added a lot to their steady annual flow. In the first year took all our collection to various sites around Chichester. Thereafter, we have passed the specs onto Chichester Lions via Midhurst Lions who help Chichester with storing and packing. Until a couple of years ago we held on to half the collection in Petersfield and passed these on over the following year as Midhurst's space became available. Today, having lost our store, we have to take the whole of a Spectrek run to Midhurst. Every year we pray that they do not run out of storage space.

So what happens to the specs after Midhurst? The Midhurst Lions have a regular sorting and packing session (weekly, I believe). They go through the specs discarding the junk, breakages etc. Where gold is present in the frames, they arrange for its extraction to raise money for sight-related charities both at home and abroad. Midhurst also have a regular cases and sunglasses stall at the local community centre. The repacked specs are passed on to Chichester Lions.

Chichester Lions store the packages and arrange their shipment across the channel to Le Havre to the charity "Medico France". This charity, which was set up by Lions Clubs in France, then grades the specs and prepares them for the last leg of their journey to sight projects in Africa and Asia. There is a good relationship between Lions in France and Chichester and they visit several times a year to pick up sorted specs for delivery to Le Havre. Some are also taken free of charge by "Fraser Freight", a haulage company based in Portsmouth. Although no grading takes place in Chichester, some of the rough sorted specs are sent to a prison just outside Durham where prisoners grade them with equipment donated to them and then these specs are sent on to France in the normal way. For further details of the process, please log onto www.chilions.org.uk

Any money collected en-route or donations received from other clubs, is donated to the Lions Sight Savers Trust for Comprehensive Eye Services.

SpecTrek is an exhausting day which is itself the culmination of a year's work by Lions Clubs all over central southern England. But when one looks at the outcome it is one of the most rewarding things we do. In these days of green issues the Lions spectacle collection project is more than recycling; it is reuse of a costly asset. We have nearly collected three million pairs of specs over the last 35 years; how much would they cost at today's prices? £50 million? £100 million? And, most important of all, the collection brings hope to many families in the developing world who have been blighted by loss of sight."

Lin Piatek
Petersfield Lions
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