

What has a thing called the Rubbish Diet got to do with Reconciling a Wounded Planet?

Our waste wounds our planet in the most obvious and prolific ways.

Landfills are no longer holes in the ground but rather 50m high sculpted hills.

Our production of rubbish is out of control – plastic pollution in the oceans where manmade particles outnumber plankton by 6:1.

Every last wilderness on earth is tainted by our detritus that we have simply thrown away.

In less than 2 hours in the UK we produce enough waste to fill the Albert Hall.

Rubbish pollution is the symptom of over consumption and unsustainable resource use.

Each year we produce 3% more waste than the year before.....So rubbish really does wound our planet and the problem will get worse not better.

Our legacy will be as the only species on earth that leaves more than a footprint.

Collectively we need to take action to change this legacy and reduce this waste production.

What can we do about it?

So what can we do about this massive ever growing out of control problem – well it doesn't seem to work just shocking people so we have developed a lighter touch.....

The Rubbish Diet: A simple tool to help individuals and communities take effective action on an enormous problem.

We are an encouraging voice rather than weighing people down with the burden of the waste problem.

Everyone has a bin and almost everyone buys stuff – so relevant to everyone – everyone can take action.

We talk about the benefits of getting to grips with your bin, wasting less food and the triumphs of finding goods with no packaging or fully recyclable packaging – and the joy of never having to worry about missing bin day again!

So what is the Rubbish Diet?

Accessible as an on-line diet or a diet to share with friends.

The Rubbish Diet challenge is 3 simple steps

1. Start by becoming a recycling expert where you live – commit to refreshing your knowledge of what goes where in your kerbside

- collection and find out where else you can recycle different stuff – this gets all the dry stuff out of your bin.
2. Next step is making the most of your food – we are hearing a lot about food waste making up 20% of the waste we produce – a whopping 50% of food bought in the UK is thrown away – so our second step is geared to helping people to avoid wasting food – indeed to help them make the most of their food.
 3. The third step is all about looking in your bin and seeing what is still in there! What are you partial to that comes in non-recyclable packaging – this step helps you find ways to ditch the disposables and find alternative naked products or at least those with recyclable packaging

So what difference does the Rubbish Diet make?

Our Dieters typically slim their bins by 40% - i.e. from a full wheelie bin to just over half.

Now it's one thing to take a short challenge over 3 weeks and slim your bin – but what happens after the end of the challenge?

We ask our dieters if they can keep up the slim bin and overwhelmingly, they say “yes no problem – it's easy”.

So the exciting thing is that The Rubbish Diet appears to encourage a permanent change – a permanent reduction in waste.

So what is the reach of the Rubbish Diet?

The Rubbish diet is a national tool that anyone can access on line – the on-line diet is geared to your postcode so hooks you into your local recycling services.

We engage all sorts of households from those for whom thinking about recycling is novel as well as those people who are already taking action regarding their waste and consumption.

The Rubbish Diet creates a community of people who are connected to their consumption. Slimming your bin is the beginning of a journey towards a more sustainable life style. A life style that treads more lightly on the planet.

How do we reach more bins?

There is no doubt that slimming bins one by one is effective but it is slow

The ideal situation is where a dieter loves the diet so much they want to tell other people about it – so we have developed ways of helping groups of people to slim their bins together – in their church, their street or through their community group.

The Rubbish Diet on your street

2 of our dieters in Shrewsbury happened to live on the same street – and they decided they would like to get their street all slimming their bins.

They leafleted the street asking people to come to a meeting on Sunday afternoon to eat cake and talk rubbish. 8 families turned out and the Ashley Street Rubbish Diet group was born. This core group took the rubbish diet together. They met once a month to compare notes on what could be done with different stuff, to share their successes and their bin disasters (and to eat cake!)

There are some things that are not picked up through the kerbside recycling system in Shrewsbury – so in Ashley Street they have a rota where a family puts up a recycling point sign on Friday lunchtime and everyone can drop off the stuff to go to the Household recycling centre on Saturday afternoon. They collect cardboard, batteries, Tetra Pak, textiles, electrical items.....

22 households are now involved and the benefits are evident.

Not only has the street saved approximately 20 tonnes of waste from landfill over the last 2 years, but taking the rubbish diet has made them conscious of the need to use resources wisely. They share resources and support each other – elderly folk in the street are able to recycle much more because the trip to the HRC is done for them.

One of the best benefits of the Ashley Street Rubbish diet is the fact that people have got to know each other better, the community is closer and stronger through talking rubbish.

Caring for God's Creation

Howard and I have worked together to incorporate the Rubbish Diet into a booklet for the Christian community – originally as a Lent booklet as a practical guide for action during Lent and then as a more general document that can be used at any time during the year.

The booklet has been used by 3 churches in Shrewsbury, by 2 churches in Powys and by a parish in North Yorkshire.

We decided to produce a hard copy resource which makes it more accessible to a wider church audience – however – this means it needs to be adapted for each church to make it relevant to a particular area.

What are the benefits of taking the Rubbish Diet?

The benefits of taking the rubbish diet are varied –

The obvious benefit is the reduction in waste that will languish in our world as we ensure that we first recycle wherever possible and then begin to reduce the total amount of stuff we consume.

This in turn reduces pressure on council budgets – I for one would much rather my council tax were spent on useful things like roads and nurses and TAs rather than just getting rid of my rubbish....

As I mentioned before taking the rubbish diet is often just the first step in a journey for people – in a light hearted way it raises awareness about our impact on the earth – we are creating a community of concerned people – the feeling that you aren't alone in trying to reduce your waste – it is empowering to know that thousands of households across the country are also making a concerted effort to slim their bin.

And talking rubbish can strengthen a community – At the first meeting of Woodfield Road Rubbish Diet group – one lady said “This is the first time I have ever been invited to anything on our road”. People in Ashley Street have met their neighbours and got to know each other through the Rubbish Diet.

Next steps

To sum up... the Rubbish Diet is an easy, gentle way to make a difference and create permanent change.

Now – I love talking to faith communities because there is no reason to explain why we need to reduce our consumption in order to protect our earth. But that understanding often means that individuals are already living the dream when it comes to slim bins! I imagine that most people here today are already conscious consumers and are treading lightly – so you guys simply taking the rubbish diet would be amazing but not earth shattering in terms of waste reduction.

What we need to do is recognise our responsibility to encourage our neighbours, friends, communities to see the need to tread lightly – ans a really simple way to do this is to make a cake and hold a rubbish diet meeting on your street!