

The Blue Tangerine Federation

Specialist and Special Educational Needs Schools

An Interview with Fundraiser, Gillian Lawton



Gillian Lawton joined the school as a TA in 2012. Quickly, she gained a reputation for getting things done and bringing in resources. From 2013, Gillian started raising money and support for The Collett School and then was coerced into working full-time to embark on fundraising projects for the school. The rest is history, as they say...

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What's your journey over the past 8 years been like?

Oh my goodness how do you summarise that! It has been so many clichés, a roller coaster, a Greek tragedy, a soap opera, a side-splitting comedy but most of all a challenging adventure and a privilege.

The evenings flopping on the Head's sofa in despair when working on a project which was desperately needed with no budget. The frustration of trying to project manage a task with dozens of volunteers who generously gave their time, expertise and materials but therefore could not be pinned to a time slot which would upset the other generous donator who couldn't organize their workload until the other was complete! Desperation of "well I will do it myself". Digging trenches for services to the treehouse at 3am in clay and flint on my own, moving things twice my height and weight. Mopping Mr Hoults- Allen's brow and fixing his stare when he did his first radio interviews to raise our profile. Intrepid explorers who crawled through a half demolished building site of an old school to see if there were any material or furniture we could use. It's been a blast!

The sheer joy of providing a small item for a child which made a real difference or creating areas "fit for purpose" The Pride of taking a visitor around our quirky, warm, friendly school and watching their perception and understanding change.

What have been your personal highlights?

This has to be the children and staff. It has been a privilege, in some small way, to support this incredible hardworking, selfless team. They are inspired and dedicated but there is only so far you can go with inadequate resources, equipment and space! To be able to help them to do nothing short of life changing work with "our" children and seeing the difference they make to both the child and their families has been an honour.

One highlight was operating the crane that swung the second hand Warner Bros ex Harry Potter portacabin over our fence!

What are you most proud of?

The school being now known as the one with the Treehouses and not the one where the "funny" kids go

The very "Collett" Entrance and the comments it brings "wish this was my school" "This is not what I expected at all" "this school makes you feel so welcome and warm inside"

The “Lost Summer” when we did everything from plastering to painting to building furniture to make child centred changes for the school. Changing the way our classrooms were organized completely.

How exhausting has it all been?

The first two years I worked on TA pay, term time only. Had no holidays and worked every day of the week. I was driven like for no other job because if I stopped then I knew there was a real quantifiable, sometimes physical and mental cost to the children I cared so much for. Instead of easing, the work got more and more demanding and imperative. It is true to say my poor family have been unbelievable, something I hope to now make up for. I could literally talk of nothing else and had little time for anything else. Hagrid and the Hobbit, as we were known, were on a mission!

When you look around the schools, can you see the impact you’ve had?

There is not a nook, cranny, socket or pain I do not know. I have done my best but that is not enough, so much more needs and will always need to be done for the ever changing intake of special children. I hope as time is progressing we can get more of the “real stuff” our children and staff deserve and less of the make do and mend we have been so grateful to have. However, I will always have a soft spot for and fond memories of our quirky Hogwarts meets Industrial style we created.

Have you been to any swanky events as fundraiser?

Warner Bros have become firm friends of the school and supported us in so many ways, not least the belief they had in us and what we were trying to achieve. They kindly invited us to many events at the studios, which was amazing!

The awards ceremony at Leicester Square with Ant and Dec for the Princes Trust project we spearheaded

Who’s helped you on your way?

The main man has always been the incredible being that is Mr Hoult-Allen. He is gifted and insightful and has the ability to inspire others and completely compelling communication abilities. Once met never forgotten.

The terrific good humour and belief of my colleagues in the office, particularly Rachael Lampey who has never been afraid of rolling her sleeves up when needed and the gorgeous Mary Cochrane, artistic, kind and generous. Incredible teaching staff who find time to spur me on especially Jennie Witter and Sally Morton.

What do you think are the biggest challenges going forward for fundraising?

Keeping it fresh, multi-faceted, engaging and current. Finding new avenues and not exhausting existing ones. It is a very gifted team that I am confident and proud to pass the baton too. Helping to make leaving as easy as it could be.

Which cocktails will you be sipping on the beach, when retirement finally comes?

In the words of Winnie The Pooh “How lucky am I To Have Something That Makes Saying Goodbye So Hard”

I am going to love having plenty of quality time for my four children and their lovely partners. My husband and I are planning lots of travel but most of all I am looking forward to the adventures I will have with my Grandchildren!

“Don’t let your dreams be dreams” This was my dream job, thank you.

SOME OF THE PROJECTS

- Front path
- Car parking
- Minibuses
- Primary playgrounds
- Hobbit House
- Primary classroom
- Room remodels – Carousel project
- Entrance
- Signage
- Storage
- Lighting
- Rebound therapy training and equipment
- Laptops
- Interactive screens
- Desktops
- Flooring
- Decorating
- Reading Eggs
- Books
- Music, swimming and riding lessons for underprivileged families
- Holidays for underprivileged families
- Maths apps and resources
- Prom and school leavers
- School and class outings
- Visiting Theatres etc
- Disabled lifts

- Toasters, kettles, fans, heaters, fridges etc
- Class budgets
- Cookers
- Contribution to new windows
- Furniture – new and donated
- Medical room
- Trees and plants
- Fencing
- PE equipment
- Light and sound in hall
- The Hive
- Repurposing rooms IT, Science, Art
- Mobile café
- 2 Treehouse classrooms
- Playground gym
- Music room
- Resources room
- Temporary classroom
- Muga
- People carrier
- Loads of skips!
- I pads
- Shredders
- Staff and Office kitchens
- Maintenance
- New block toilets
- Outdoor classroom/gazebo

- Princes Trust book project
- Bikes, go-karts etc
- Numerous events i.e online auction and annual charity gala dinner dance
- Numerous fundraisers including Skydiving, Wingwalking and Firewalking

FOREST HOUSE

- Laptops

ST LUKES

- 9 ³/₄
- Fencing
- Primary resources
- Laptops
- Desktops
- Aviary
- Picnic benches