

On Brighton beach, of course.

Irene Soler lives in Kemp Town. The graphic designer and permaculturist is a regular beachcomber, who picks up litter on her daily wanders. Struck by the diversity of the things she found, and slightly overwhelmed by how much she collected each day, Irene started arranging and photographing her finds. She called them Souvenirs Brighton Beach. She hoped they would help people become more aware of a global problem at a local level.

One thing she noticed was that most of the days her eclectic (mainly plastic) stash would include bottle tops. Brightly coloured plastic bottle tops.



How the plot thickened...

Irene began talking to people about her idea to do something with bottle tops. First, she spoke to her fellow members of The Appreciation Society, a CIC (Community Interest Company) that is always “looking for change through unexpected alliances”. It needed to be something visual to raise awareness. Something to get people involved, to get them talking and thinking about how the status quo could be different. Slowly the idea of A Drop in The Ocean evolved.

It was an idea people liked the sound of. Especially the #StreetsAhead campaign by Brighton & Hove Council. They would support her with the resources they had. Council beach cleaning teams would collect and store the bottle tops. They’d create collection jars for bottle tops in cafes and kiosks along the seafront.

They began speaking to beach clean organisers, to other plastic campaigners, to people who cared about making a difference. Yes, they would help. The Volks Railway would provide a canvas for the bottle-top installation. Yes, the Seafront Office would do what they could. Cafes and restaurants right on the beach agreed to collect customers’ bottle tops, encouraging them to leave them there. Support and momentum for A Drop in the Ocean swelled like a spring tide. And then, The Appreciation Society got some funding, from the Rampion Fund at the Sussex Community Foundation.

A community subplot

In essence, this is a story about collecting and counting bottle tops. Assessing things like what brands are the most common, what causes spikes in the numbers, and how many tops come from water bottles. It’s about using them to design and make something that will in turn make people more aware of how things as small and “inconsequential” as bottle tops can quickly add up.

But underlying all that is making things happen as a community that cares. A Drop in The Ocean is as much about connecting people who care as it is about collecting plastic.

Through organised beach cleans, through your individual or informal groups efforts, through the physical making of our infographic in a series of workshops, we hope bottle tops will bring people with enthusiasm and good ideas together.

The ending

Officially, this story ends at the end of 2018, with an infographic made of bottle tops brightening the fence along the Volks Railway. But we’re hoping it will spark the beginning for another story, or fuel one that’s already being written. Perhaps it will be just a chapter in a story where local people collaborate and take powerful actions that would mean the fence would be bare if this story was re-enacted in the future.

Now that would be a good ending.