**Novie Craven** (00:00:06)

You're tuning into Season 7, Episode 3 of Inclusion Revolution Radio, sponsored by Lions Clubs International Foundation. I'm your host, Novie Craven. I'm excited to welcome you back to this season. If you're one of our longtime listeners, you may notice something different. For Season 7, we're bringing you the action from the D.C. studios of Podville Media. Podville Media is a leading production studio and has partnered with Inclusion Revolution Radio to enhance the mission of inclusion on air.

Joining us today is a global leader of service, fierce advocate of community empowerment and someone whose heart beats for inclusion. Mark Lyon is the Second Vice President of Lions Clubs International, one the most largest and most impactful service organizations in the world. With over 40 years of experience in corporate leadership and nearly three decades as a devoted Lion, Mark has dedicated his life to making an impactful change. Mark, welcome to Inclusion Revolution Radio.

We're excited to have you here.

**Mark Lyon** (00:59:18)

Thank you, Novie, it's great to be here with you today.

**Novie Craven** (01:01:29)

You joined Brookfield Lions Club in 1996. What was your aha moment that made you say, this isn't just a club, this is a movement?

**Mark Lyon** (01:13:19)

You when I first joined my local Lions Club, I was amazed at how many service opportunities they took advantage of in the community. So, it was really a compilation of everything that the club did. There was nothing that they would not do to help people in the community.

**Novie Craven** (01:29:00)

You’ve served in every possible leadership role in Lions Clubs International and now you're International Second Vice President. What are you hoping to shake up or challenge during your tenure?

**Mark Lyon** (01:39:03)

There's a lot to do with our organization. We are a very busy group of people, but it's important that we continue to think outside the box. We talk about that. We talk about tearing up the envelope and just coming up with new ways to serve, new innovation, to use technology to help us to serve better, to serve more people. So, we're looking to make changes that will be really unique for people in different parts of the world who are serving in their own Lions Clubs.

**Novie Craven** (02:07:06)

Some people say traditional service organizations are aging out. What would you say to the critics who think long-time-standing service organizations aren't evolving fast enough?

**Mark Lyon** (02:18:28)

You know, Lions Clubs International has been around for almost 110 years now. And we do have an age issue, but the age only relates to the energy level of the membership. I would love to have a 70- or 80-year-old brand new Lion who's full of new ideas, full of passion for what we do any day of the week. But we do have to watch that. We do have to be careful about the way that our Lions participate in their communities and make sure that we continue to offer them the resources to do what they really want to do and what the people need in their communities. But any new Lion brings new ideas, new ways of thinking that are important for our clubs to experience. When our membership is stagnant, which we never want to see, we get caught up in doing the same thing over and over again. But new members bring new life, new ways of thinking that help our clubs to grow.

**Novie Craven** (03:12:02)

Let's say I'm brand new to Lions Clubs International. What is one program you would tell me to check out first if you wanted me to be blown away by what is possible through service?

**Mark Lyon** (03:23:11)

So, there's a lot of things we could do. The first thing I would do as a Lion in welcoming you into our club is to ask you what you want to do. Because we never want to tell our new members that we only do certain things. We want to make sure that everybody's voice is heard. One of the great programs that we're running now is called KidSight. And it's an eye screening program for children as young as six months old to look at their eyes with a very simple reader device that just takes a split second to read their eyes to see what kind of care, if any, they need to protect their eyes, whether they need glasses, whether they have any other issues that are identifiable. That's a unique program that clubs of any size can do. It's a basic service that we should be doing in every community in which we serve. But one of the programs and initiatives that I think is most important to Lions is our advocacy program. And that can take on a whole life of its own.

That could be anything from working with your local elected leaders to find out what is important and what's going on that Lions can work on, to advocating for our Lions services at the national level and even at the international level. And Lions have a unique relationship with the United Nations that goes back to the very beginning in 1945, where we've offered our services as Lions because of our membership and the size of our clubs to help people in need in unique ways working with those organizations.

**Novie Craven** (04:51:03)

You said the age starts from six months to what age does it go on to?

**Mark Lyon** (04:57:07)

So, for the KidSight program, we're looking at children ages six months to up about four or five years old is a critical point in time. So, think about preschool, as they get into kindergarten would be an important time to make sure that all children have their eyes screened. We find that the KidSight program is adding on to what's already done, but we want to make sure that the schools understand and that the parents understand that there could be some underlying issues that could be creating problems in school with helping the children to learn because they can't see things. They can't see the boards. They can't work with items on the tables because their vision is not right. And so, the eye screenings can help, but we need to get them before they hit that critical age of four to five years old.

**Novie Craven** (05:45:18)

Do you have a program for adults?

**Mark Lyon** (05:49:02)

We do eye screenings for adults, yes. It's not as common, but it is doable. I think it depends on the location where we are and how important it is to do eye screenings for communities that don't have access to good eye health care.

**Novie Craven** (06:04:06)

What is one uncomfortable truth about global volunteerism that no one likes to admit but you think we should talk more about?

**Mark Lyon** (06:12:29)

I think there's definitely a separation in the way we think about service these days. There's a lot of change going on in the world. And what it's tended to do is to pull people inwards rather than reaching outside into their communities. So, we need to address that. We need to address what's called social capital. We need to get out in front of people more. That's the very essence of who we are as Lions with Lions Clubs in our individual communities.

So, we need to focus on that and not focus on that inward looking part of our world, which is taking us away from helping people in need.

**Novie Craven** (06:51:00)

I'd love to talk more about Special Olympics - Lions Club International Foundation's Mission: Inclusion partnership from your perspective. What makes the relationship different from other collaborations?

**Mark Lyon** (07:02:27)

You know, we have to look at the fact first that Lions Clubs International has about 1.4 million members in well over 200 countries around the world. And we work with Special Olympics everywhere we can. This is a unique partnership that's gone on for, it'll be 25 years next year. And that durability, that sustainability of the program is really what's important. We see the important connections that we have with Special Olympics. We're thinking about doing things in the same way. And Mission: Inclusion is part of that effort to make sure that we're reaching out to every part of our community and pulling them in to make sure that they have a better life.

**Novie Craven** (07:43:16)

Lions Clubs International recently presented our Chairman, Dr. Tim Shriver, with the prestigious Presidential Medal for his global leadership and service. During the meeting, Dr. Shriver discussed the crisis of connection. What does this mean to you? And how can our two organizations team up to fight back against division and isolation?

**Mark Lyon** (08:03:01)

That's a great question, Novie, and we had a great conversation with Tim Shriver last month. And he raised this book that had been written about the crisis of connection. It's really unique because it talks about alienation and isolation. A lot of that is driven by the world that we're living in now. Technology has a role in that, sadly, but it's a reality that we have to address.

So, looking at that, we have to keep finding ways to reach back out. And I mentioned the word social capital before. And I think that's really important to connect to because as we look at what we're doing, and Lions are very proactive in reaching out to the communities, we don't do anything in isolation. Our goal is to reach out to the community and touch those areas that need help. And so, the crisis of connection really addresses some of those key issues.

But I think as we look at that and we continue to look at ways to work together to address that isolation, to get people out and working with each other and doing service projects that are beneficial, we'll be in a much better place.

**Novie Craven** (09:14:08)

Lions Clubs International prides itself on strong leadership and responsible oversight. As a global organization with far-reaching impact, how do you ensure quality control that in fact supports and empowers grassroots efforts?

**Mark Lyon** (09:28:08)

You know, addressing the grassroots side of that question is really important because as a service club organization, the clubs are our most important asset. And we need to make sure that we do whatever we can as an association to give the clubs the resources they need. So, our professional staff is amazing, and we work very closely with them. And we're volunteers, Lions Clubs members are volunteers. And our staff is incredibly professional in their areas of expertise.

So, they work with us in so many ways to create training resources, ways to look at our clubs a little deeper to make them better, new service initiatives that might work in some parts of the world. So, they're always trying to help us to do more. And that's really that unique partnership that we have with our professional staff is to be able to work together to find new ways to impact and improve on those grassroots efforts.

**Novie Craven** (10:26:18)

Lions Clubs International has supported everything from Opening Eyes to Unified Sports to Family Health Forums with Special Olympics. When you look at these joint efforts, what's the impact you're most proud of?

**Mark Lyon** (10:36:23)

No, all of them, quite honestly. I mean, we have worked really hard with Special Olympics over the years to make sure that our Lions and our Leos are participating in these service opportunities. The Opening Eyes program is a huge, huge thing, and that's where it all started nearly 25 years ago. I'll do a plug for my home, Multiple District 23, which just hosted its Opening Eyes event where they did eye screenings for 230 athletes just this past weekend.

**Novie Craven** (11:03:29)

Congratulations.

**Mark Lyon** (11:04:16)

It's a great thing to get involved with and we work with our local eye care health community along with our Lions and Leos to make sure that we provide a great environment of not only sport but entertainment and health care for the athletes when they come in. But there's so many initiatives that we work on together and we're going to make sure that we continue to do that for the years ahead.

**Novie Craven** (11:28:27)

I think also when we, when athletes go to USA Games or Winter Games, we always have like a health side, because you can get your eyes checked, your ears checked, your toes checked. Cause you want to, you know, be healthy, you know, in Special Olympics. Sometimes, everybody likes to eat junk food. That includes me sometimes. But also, we also want to eat healthy because when we do like track, we run a lot. And I think that's definitely a lot because when you eat healthy, but also want to be, you know, unhealthy a little bit, you gotta divide. You say, okay, if you want to do something, you gotta eat healthy.

And I think that when you guys speak about health, it gives us more insight for it.

**Mark Lyon** (12:12:03)

Yeah, I think that's really important, Novie, too, because when you're working with the local Lions and Leos, they're bringing in doctors that are specialists in areas that are important to the Special Olympics athletes. We need to make sure that we're talking about a whole health program, whether it's healthy eating, healthy exercise, the types of things that are important to make sure that you can continue to compete at those levels for a long, long time. So that's an important part of it on the side of Lions where we do the eye screenings and we can provide eyeglasses and sunglasses for the athletes. By the time they're done with their competition, a lot of them who would need glasses will be able to leave the event with a new set of glasses or sunglasses as well.

**Novie Craven** (12:55:24)

If the future of Lions Clubs International and Special Olympics is a blank canvas, what's the boldest thing you'd love to see happen in next five years?

**Mark Lyon** (13:03:19)

You know, I would love to see our Lions take on Special Olympics and create these inclusive clubs. We serve clubs that are focused on bringing people together and just dealing with humanity rather than creating more traditional clubs but creating these special clubs that are focused on inclusion and belonging and keeping that community growing and gaining strength in the future.

I think that is our purpose and our mission going forward is to make sure that we continue to open our doors to all people to ensure that we allow them, our new members to have service opportunities that are meaningful to them. And I think we will do that. I think we have a mission that really resonates with people, and we need to keep doing that in the days ahead.

**Novie Craven** (13:52:06)

I definitely cannot say enough how much you really guys are so supportive of Special Olympics. Mark, I ask this question to all my guests on the show. What does inclusion mean to you?

**Mark Lyon** (14:03:18)

Inclusion is belonging. You know, it's about relationships. It's about understanding and it's about acceptance. When we met with Tim Shriver, we talked about the difference between participation in versus identifying as. And that participation in really resonated with me because it's all about acceptance. It's all about the importance of community building. And we need to learn to do that better as a society, as humans, we need to do that better, especially in the challenging world we live in today.

**Novie Craven** (14:44:09)

It started — when did the Lions Clubs start? In 1996, right?

**Mark Lyon** (14:47:26)

1917.

**Novie Craven** (14:49:14)

I don't think I was...

**Mark Lyon** (14:51:01)

So, we just had our 108th birthday last week.

**Novie Craven** (14:55:18)

I was born in ‘89, no I was not, was I? No, I was not born.

**Mark Lyon** (14:59:13)

You were not born in 1917.

**Novie Craven** (15:01:13)

No, I was born in ‘89. We have a, so I do Special Olympics DC. When you see me run, I'm like a cheetah. And I do the 100-meter dash in the four-by-four relay and the long jump. And definitely we just train every single time. I have a great Unified partner.

**Mark Lyon** (15:24:27)

I want to come out and see you compete. And I want to bring people to come. We can cheer you on.

**Novie Craven** (15:30:02)

I think that says a lot because… So, can you talk about how the volunteerism is so important?

**Mark Lyon** (15:37:26)

Oh my gosh, know, volunteering is, we talked about that a little bit earlier about, you know, what's changing and why things are not as active as they are in our communities like they have been in the past. And so, volunteering is still important for a lot of people, but it's fading away in some ways. And I don't think we have an explanation for that. I don't think we, if we knew what the answer was, we'd go and solve it.

But in the current environment that we live in, volunteering is not a priority for a lot of people. We lead busy lives. People have careers, people have families, and we understand that. But Lions members also understand the importance of finding that balance. And giving back through volunteering is definitely one of those things that is kind of just wired in our membership. And we need to make sure that we share that. We need to tell those stories.

Like you shared stories about what you do and what's important to you, we need to continue to share that dialogue with everyone we meet so they understand that it makes us feel good to do these kind of activities.

**Novie Craven** (16:43:17)

What's the best part of working for the Lions Clubs?

**Mark Lyon** (17:02:21)

For me, it's voluntary service. And to me, that's the essence of what it's all about. I've always been someone who has tried to give back to the community. And Lions has given me an opportunity to take that on a much larger scale and to encourage more people to want to volunteer, more people to want to take on service initiatives and help people that don't have the same opportunities. And we're always looking for new ways to introduce service in communities around the world.

We have Lions in Ukraine, we have Lions in Moscow, we have Lions in China, we have Lions in every country practically around the world, all doing service, all doing things that are very important in their own communities. But at the end of the day, we're all Lions. So, we all operate under this umbrella of our We Serve purpose, our We Serve motto.

So, sharing that story is really important. We consider ourselves to be one big happy family. We may not always get along, but at the end of the day, we are still family. And we have to take care of each other. So that whole message of inclusion, that whole subject of acceptance, and recognizing that people have different abilities and disabilities, and that's okay because we're all part of humankind, and we need to make sure that we recognize that.

**Novie Craven** (18:10:27)

So, what was the first state to start the Lions Clubs?

**Mark Lyon** (18:16:08)

The state of Illinois is where it all began, just in Chicago.

**Novie Craven** (18:21:06)

That’s where Special Olympics had their first… Eunice had their first Special Olympics competition… in Soldier Field in Chicago.

**Mark Lyon** (18:29:23)

That’s where it is, that’s right.

**Novie Craven** (18:31:25)

So, Lions Clubs started in Chicago. Where is the last place it has…

**Mark Lyon** (18:41:02)

Oh, the newest, the newest country? So, we're broken down by constitutional area. So, the U.S. is constitutional area one, because that's where it started. Constitutional area two is Canada, because they were the next ones to join to extend into Lions. And it goes like that around each continent on the world. But the continent of Africa is our newest constitutional area. And we allowed them to become separate from where they were because they grew so much. We had over 30,000 Lions on the continent of Africa. Now, that's a big place and a lot of countries. So, 30,000 might not seem like a lot, but it is because most of the Lions are in major cities and areas where the people are, quite as that's where the service is needed. But now what we're seeing is that Africa is growing in the country and the countryside. So, more and more communities are realizing what Lions Clubs can do to help them. And they're starting to build new clubs in different parts too, on the countryside.

**Novie Craven** (19:50:24)

Did you ever go to Africa to basically present them a recognition, basically recognize them?

**Mark Lyon** (20:00:11)

Yeah, we've been to a couple of different countries in Africa. We've been to Tunisia, which is up on the Mediterranean Sea. And we've been to Kenya and been to Egypt. All very, very different areas, different cultures, even some different languages. But the Lions do the same kind of things, which is really cool to see too.

Novie, you've been asking some great questions of me, but I wanted to ask, what does inclusion mean to you?

**Novie Craven** (20:29:23)

Wow. Inclusion means one, we're one big family, but also athletes of all abilities are able to shine, you know, and I think that says a lot because some athletes are not able to play sports, have a job, drive a car. And I think that says a lot because when we are able to shine, every athlete I've been encountered with has the biggest smile, I mean, we even cry.

I think that says a lot because we are able to say, okay, nobody's gonna judge us, nobody's gonna do anything to us, we just wanna do what we're able to. We wanna train what we're training for, we wanna show, not just our friends, but also our family what we're able to do. And I think that says a lot for not just me, but other athletes around the world.

**Mark Lyon** (21:26:00)

Have you seen a change in attitudes of people in your working with them in all these sports events and other activities with Special Olympics? Do you see a change happening, a positive change?

**Novie Craven** (21:38:08)

I think that when I talk about Special Olympics to somebody, and I say, you want to come volunteer, they come volunteer and their mouth is wide open, they're like, well, I didn't know you could run that fast. I didn't know you could do that. And I think it's… they're taken back because they're like, I didn't know she can do that. I didn't know she could do this.

**Mark Lyon** (21:57:12)

I had a chance to meet a Special Olympics athlete when I was over in Europe earlier last year. And his name is Michael, and he has really profound intellectual and physical disabilities. But he skis. He's a downhill skier with his father. His father is his coach, and they have a special adaptive ski chair that he uses for athletic competitions in his part of Europe. And it's amazing to see him because you can tell even to ask him to express his joy in it, because we met in a conference room. We didn't meet on a ski slope. And he still shared that joy of his competition and how much fun it was. Just the way he reacted, his body reacted so positively to the opportunity that he's been given to compete in sports at a very different level. It's wonderful.

**Novie Craven** (22:53:02)

Mark, thank you for sharing your insight and inspiring work of the Lions Clubs International Foundation. Your leadership and commitment to global service reminds us that Mission: Inclusion impacts communities around the world. A big thank you as well to the Lions Clubs International Foundation for sponsoring this episode and for the continued commitment to Special Olympics and athletes of all abilities. If you enjoyed today's conversation, be sure to subscribe to Inclusion Revolution Radio and follow us on Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn at Special Olympics. We will see you next time for more incredible stories that celebrate communities, empowerment and inclusion.