

# A Briton's one-man campaign for a litter-free Marseille

April 5 2016, by Hugues Jeanneaud

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Briton Eddie Platt, founder of the "1 Piece of Rubbish" project, poses in front of an artwork made with plastic waste by Swiss designer Roman Aebersold as part of an exhibition entitled "La mer, destination finale" in Marseille

Most people are resigned to a little litter in their lives.

Not Eddie Platt, a British expatriate who single-handedly took on the scourge in Marseille, the southern French city where he took up

residence in 2010.

The 38-year-old launched his quirky campaign last September with a Facebook page titled "1 Dechet par Jour / 1 Piece of Rubbish".

The idea is simple, if not particularly sexy: participants post selfies on a social network—Facebook, Instagram or Twitter—each time they pick up a piece of litter and put it in the rubbish bin.

Ten tonnes of rescued rubbish later, the effort has cyber fans around the world from Buenos Aires to New York, and TV and newspapers are hounding Platt for interviews.

It was in Platt's hometown of Leeds, northern England, that the idea first came to him.

"I went back to Leeds last summer and I realised that my hometown was dirty, that the filth wasn't just in Marseille," he said. "To think that for four years I was saying 'it's cleaner in England'!"

In fact Platt shot his founding litter-binning selfie in Leeds' sprawling Roundhay Park, one of Europe's biggest city parks.



Briton Eddie Platt, founder of the "1 Piece of Rubbish" project, poses in front of an artwork made with plastic waste by Swiss designer Roman Aebersold as part of an exhibition entitled "La mer, destination finale" in Marseille

The Yorkshireman says he does not self-identify as green but simply as a concerned citizen.

"Eddie is a guy with amazing energy. He talks about his idea all the time, and he's really into social networking," said his friend Georges-Edouard Legre.

One Sunday Platt—who has only an approximate mastery of French—led some 350 Marseillais on a climb up the city's tallest hill, topped by the imposing basilica Our Lady of the Guard, for a clean-up operation.

A few weeks later, the litter-pickers descended on the city's Old Port.

Platt is hard to miss with his infectious smile, greying beard and backwards baseball cap, not to mention his towering height—he is six foot three (1.90 metres).

Combine that with an irreverence worthy of Monty Python and Legre was quickly seduced. "I told him, 'If you succeed in changing the habits of the Marseillais, I will worship you.'"

Legre, who says he is "100 percent Marseillais", specialises in "viral marketing" and set Platt up with his [social networking](#) tools.

And Romain Jouanaud, who uses the same coworking lounge as Platt, lent his artistic skills to the campaign: "I told him, 'Let me create symbols to get the idea across without words.'"

## **'Picking up litter got sexy'**

Platt has had a varied career, working as a restaurant manager in England for "about 10 years, to make some money", then as a sales rep for a high-tech firm, before training to teach English abroad.

"I left to teach in Poland and my income went down 90 percent. Money didn't motivate me anymore, I wanted to help people enrich their lives," Platt says.

He had business cards printed with the tag line "a f\*\*\*cking English teacher".

Five years ago, a friend suggested he teach in Naples, southern Italy. But as he was hitchhiking in the general direction he blew in to Marseille, and it was love at first sight.

"It's an innovative city," he said. "It's poor, people are struggling but there's good energy."

Now Platt and his friends are raising money and brainstorming future projects.

"Picking up litter got sexy," he said. "We're not going to stop there!"

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Citation: A Briton's one-man campaign for a litter-free Marseille (2016, April 5) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-04-briton-one-man-campaign-litter-free-marseille.html>

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