

Chairman's Report

19th April 2009

Life-saving, as a sport, a hobby, a life-skill, and a vocation continues to evolve. The challenges that it faces are very clear for anyone to see:

- People have more and more conflicting demands on their time
- When they invest time and money in an activity they expect more and more back in return
- They prioritise on the basis of what they see others doing - especially through the media
- They tend to decide what to do, less on the basis of what they simply enjoy doing, and more on the basis of what they will get out of it or the glamour associated with it.

The impacts on our Branch are that we have a constant struggle to get new volunteers and to get reasonably priced pool time; and the only way in which we can 'compete' with the other demands on people, is by persistently trying to raise our profile, by being seen to be active by as many people as possible.

- In the last four years, we have substantially increased the teaching community of the Branch - there are now more Trainers, Assessors, and Assistant Teachers than there have ever been. This year alone, more than a dozen new members were added to this pool.
- The Branch competition again demonstrated the enthusiasm that even the youngest of kids have for the fun and excitement of competing. I don't think anyone will forget the sight of one tiny little girl propelling her board along the pool to regain the lead for her team to the cheers of her team mates. We are lucky to have a group of keen officials to make this happen, but especially Stephanie Andrews who continues to steer this event and we are delighted to support her efforts to help shape the sport at a national level.
- The attendance at the Save a Baby's Life Roadshows in Guildford, Crawley and other adjacent counties to which our teaching community contributed was phenomenal - as many as 200 people in one room at one time learning CPR. These events are incredibly important to raise profile.
- Our returns show that interest in all the awards continues - not only the vocational ones (the NPLQ and NBLQ) but also the Bronze Medallion and higher awards. Don't let anyone tell you that these are 'dead' - that is old news from five years back - they are very much in demand today. Changes in the way they are administered and, most recently, the shift to teacher-assessment, mean that perceived barriers to them no longer exist. The enthusiasm for these, though, is down to a dozen or so very proactive teachers around the county who raise their profile, and they are the people who deserve the credit for this.
- When someone shows enthusiasm it is amazing what can be achieved. In the far north east of the county, Geoff Peake, having retired from full-time teaching, has already begun to establish a new community of life savers and we continue to hope that this will be repeated in the far South West with a new competition-focused club in the Guildford area.
- Other profile raising activities include the home-based Save a Baby's Life courses, of which many are run over the year, and of course, the Cricket Coaches courses which Tina Marley has championed. In both cases, the Society sees these as vital 'out reach' activities and, as a Branch, we support and subsidize them wherever necessary.

Behind the scenes of a successful Branch are a team of people paddling furiously but displaying calm when ludicrous demands are placed on them. I want to mention and thank,

Alison Angiolini who as one of the BLCs is very much the public face of lifesaving in the County to many people. In the last couple of years, we've seen a shift of officers and both Kathryn Anderson and Gail Moore have risen to the challenges of their roles seamlessly and with huge professionalism even when people seem to think that they are full-time paid employees who have nothing else to do with their time.

As most of you know, Ray Jordan, has been a stalwart of the Branch for a very long time. Last year he indicated that he would like to step down from some of his responsibilities. We hope that he won't do so completely, but as a result we have a small pool of NTAs - probationary and part-qualified in both lifesaving and lifeguarding emerging to take on some of the development work he has had to lead single handedly over the years and we are expecting to transfer the book-keeping aspects of the Treasurers role to the HQ staff so that the day-to-day hassles and pressures are off him. Hopefully, this will mean that someone will step in by this time next year to fulfill a simpler, more strategic Treasury role.

The changing nature of society and our engagement with it mean that we desperately need a PR Officer - someone with experience in the field who can help us to manage our profile and public relations. I would love to hear from anyone who was happy to help in this way.

We have struggled in the past to decide how to award the Branch trophies - gathering statistics tends to mean lots of effort to confirm that the same group or club won them this year as last. We therefore decided two years ago to invite applications for the trophies - however, despite a mailing to every club and school in the County, this produced only one, half-hearted response and we have decided not to dilute the significance of them by making any presentation this year. PLEASE, take this seriously next year, make a genuine application and I'm sure your efforts will be rewarded.

I mentioned the challenges that we face. As a society, the RLSS has to respond to these too. Last year, at the Annual Branch Conference, it was announced that a pilot reorganisation of Branches and Regions would be introduced. The idea is simple - to merge the Branches within a couple of existing Regions to create a 'super-Region' that was sufficiently large that one or more permanent paid members of staff from the RLSS could be employed to manage activities of all kinds within them. The Branches within SE Region were largely supportive of this, but in the end it was decided to pilot the scheme in the North West Midlands. It is proving successful and it will not be long, I'm sure, before this reorganisation is implemented across the country. Sooner rather than later, you will no longer be invited to a county Branch meeting, but to a Regional one.

When it happens, I hope that you will find this professional support and encouragement enthralls you to take your commitment to lifesaving to a new level. In the meantime, I hope that anyone who wants help will ask us - we really are keen to see interest in lifesaving in Surrey boom!

So, a final thanks to everyone in the Branch who has continued to keep lifesaving on the map of Surrey - making it a safer place to live.