

RLSS Surrey Branch

Chair's Report 2007-2008

This year seems to have flown by, and yet whereas in previous years there has been a great deal of change to report, this year seems to have less to focus on. There are three key messages though:

1. We continue to need to grasp the major shift that has happened in the world of life saving. In the last 20 years, the number of people who have drowned in the UK has dropped from nearly 2000 to only 450. While that is still a terrible number, it is also a clear message to the Society that our focus needs to continue to broaden. Today, our outreach activities (SABL, Cricket Coaches and Community Response to mention just a few) continue to grow in importance and this needs to be reflected in change at the Branch level too. If YOU have a target group in mind, let's hear your ideas!
2. We need to recognize the importance of volunteers in our success, and the changing nature of volunteering. Every aspect of our work involves volunteers - and yet, the number of new people stepping forward to get more involved in the Society's work is constantly reducing and our Branch is therefore under threat. What we can do is only limited by the number of 'quality' volunteers that step forward.
3. The very nature of Branches is in the balance. Unless we are adding real value to our community we have to question what we are doing! People no longer respect county boundaries for their work or leisure activities. We too need to recognise that larger geographical boundaries are important. There is a review of the role of Branches and Regions underway at the present time, and we can expect a considerably more demanding and widespread engagement in the future.

Without doubt, however, the traditional aspect of lifesaving, water-based rescue skills, has grown continuously in popularity over the last 2 or 3 years. This interest is being fueled by the Duke of Edinburgh's Scheme, the GCSE in PE and the competitive sport, especially at University level. We continue to run our Branch competition, which has attracted better and better entries, and we hope soon to see Surrey teams going on to Regional and National events. It is, however, very disappointing that despite having at least three Universities within our Branch area, we haven't as yet got any representation from them in the Branch activities. **To continue to support this growth, over the next year, we are hoping to 'seed' one or even two new clubs. Precisely where, depends on the presence of suitable volunteers to make things happen!**

A few individuals within the Branch have contributed enormously to the Society's outreach activities, and I'd like to mention them specifically:

1. Every cricket coach in the county and many beyond, has had the opportunity to be trained in essential life support by Tina Marley. We are indebted to Tina for her work. With more volunteers though, this programme could be spun out to every **sports** coach in the county!
2. Several T/As run SABL courses around the county, and nearly a dozen took part in the Tesco/Baby Safe Roadshows a few weeks ago. I would like to thank them for their huge contribution, and yet it seems almost criminal that this kind of training is not offered to the parents of EVERY new born child through their GP practice. The potential to save life is enormous, and yet we can't do so without volunteers - not only to deliver the training, but to champion the programme throughout the

County.

While talking about individuals who have made exceptional contributions to the Society over recent years, four deserve special mention:

1. **Ray Jordan**, has been our only NTA for many years. He has also held most posts within the Branch and always steps in to help out where need be. I'm sure no-one involved in the Branch can have failed to have been taught, assessed, or mentored by Ray over the years. Ray is hoping to reduce his involvement in the next year, and in particular we are hoping to recruit a suitable volunteer for the role of Treasurer. Ray - we will honour your contribution properly when you stand down as President next year, but for the time being please accept our thanks for all that you do for the Branch.
2. **Stephanie Andrews** has been Secretary for the last few years, and is standing down from this role from this AGM, but she has also been involved in the Society nationally and internationally on the competition front for many years. Stephanie, again, please accept our thanks for all that you have done, and we hope will continue to do in other ways, for the Branch.
3. **Janice Thompson** has been Awards Officer for the last eight years. Every award that you take, somehow passes through her hands, and she resolves all kinds of hassles, mistakes, and queries. She too needs time to focus on her many other activities, and will be handing over to a successor as soon as we can find a suitable volunteer. Janice, we don't know how we are going to cope without you, but are very grateful that you've offered to train up the next volunteer for this incredibly important role.
4. **Alison Angiolini**, has now served for four years as one of the two joint BLCs. 90% of the enquiries from both the public and members, come to Alison. She is constantly juggling her own life to either arrange assessors for awards, or perform those assessments when no-one else can. She has trained many of the Branches delegates for the NRASTC award, many scouts and guides, and has always stepped in to keep the Branch running smoothly. This year was to have been the year in which she would have handed over to another volunteer. So far, no one has stepped forwards and she has said she will continue until someone can be found. Alison, thank you for all that you do, and we hope that someone will be found to relieve you of some of your duties very soon.

This year, we decided to invite schools and groups to apply for the Branch trophies and awards. Every identifiable group was written to. Only a handful of the potential recipients did so. Those that won, were the deserved winners, but the rest need to be far more proactive in the next year. In a similar vein, each year we invite nominations for the Society's national honours and yet, each year, we receive very few. Please think of both these as a way of raising awareness of your organisations, and of saying "Thank you" to your volunteers.

By comparison with many others our Branch is doing well, but we could be doing so much more! So, the challenge for the next year, and beyond, is to be far more widely known, to have an even greater impact in the communities in which we serve, and to build a steady stream of new Volunteers to bring new blood and vitality to the Branch.

Thank you, Graham.