

## Chairman's Report

4th April 2011

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Last year, I was delighted to report that we had been 'bucking the trend' experienced elsewhere in the country where life-saving had been hit by fewer people volunteering generally, costs constantly rising and pressure at work leading to less time for 'optional' activities.

Over this year, I have been very fortunate to meet many more people involved across the country. As well as attending the Annual Branch Conference, the Society has organised a meeting of Branch and Regional Chairs, and I've been attending the National Communications Committee. **For supporting me to take on that last role, I'd like to say "thank you" to those of you who helped with both my nomination and election.**

What I have discovered is that the strength of local life-saving is very mixed across the RLSS UK. In some places, it is THRIVING. In others, it has all but disappeared. There are no obvious demographics associated with this. It isn't necessarily in areas badly affected by the recession. It isn't necessarily in areas where people commute long distances each day to work. It isn't necessarily in areas where the RLSS has had its role on beaches diminished because of local authority changes. Nor is it isn't necessarily in areas where the population is particularly aging or where they are getting, on average, younger!

What seem to make the biggest difference are three things;

1. Where there is a passion to get things done by the Society's stalwarts. Not to be put off by pettiness and not to engage in the age-old political shenanigans that dog most voluntary groups.
2. Where there is a dedicated group of volunteers who don't expect personal reward or even recognition for their efforts - but where the taking part, and knowing that they have made a difference, is reward enough.
3. Where people with the right skills set out to apply them professionally to the needs of the area in which they are based.

I'm delighted to say that, for what appears to be the fourth year in a row, we have continued to be one of the higher performing Branches in the Society;

On the teaching and assessing front... This year we have trained, at least, 28 Probationary Life-Saving T/As. We have added approximately 20 Assistant Teachers across three clubs to the pool of teachers (and, of course, we hope that many of them will go on to become T/As themselves at some stage in the future). We have also trained a further six Open Water T/As and are planning another programme for them this summer.

2009 was a record year for us in terms of both the number, and the nature, of awards taken. But it turns out that this wasn't a freak event! We have matched that achievement almost exactly in 2010. With 142 Bronze Medallions, 75 higher awards, 61 open water awards, 41 people have taken life-support awards alone through us, 392 swimming teachers have taken their NRASTC awards through the Branch.

The demand for Bronze Medallions continues to rise - particularly as competition for Higher Education places means students feel they need to have a Duke of Edinburgh Award and the GCSE in PE - both of which we contribute to.

You are the people who have made this sustained growth happen. You're the Trainers, Assessors, and Teachers. **Without you, this simply wouldn't have happened. So, let give us ALL a round of applause.**

Without doubt one of the most demanding jobs in the Branch is that of Awards Officer. Despite the continued pressure on her, our awards are processed and received by the candidates without a glitch. When there are problems, which are very rare, it is almost always because a trainer hasn't filled in the form properly, or because a club has not paid properly. This causes totally unnecessary extra work on behalf of the already hard-pressed volunteering by Gail. So, firstly, let's see if we can't all prevent these problems, and secondly, **let's show our appreciation for Gail's superb administration.**

I mentioned last year, that it's now a reasonable expectation of ANY 16yr old in our clubs for them to take on some teaching. The Assistant Teacher course is T/A led, so there should be no constraints on the number of ATs we can prepare.

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Sadly, statistics show us that in the last few years, the number of drownings in Britain has risen from about 500 per year to around 850 with a further 85 or so drowning abroad. The profile remains of open water, drink- and drug-related, young men being the most common to die. It is by engaging with them when they are young people, especially as young adolescents that we can make the biggest inroads into stopping this rise.

On the subject of sad statistics, we are still losing over 100,000 victims of sudden cardiac arrest in this country each year, mainly because of the lack of basic life-support skills among the community. The Society's outreach programmes are directly aimed at tackling this.

Late last year, the RLSS's main sponsor for "Save A Baby's Life" pulled out. Despite this, around the Region, there were several very successful and well-attended mass Infant and Child CPR events held. These teach life-support skills in a fast and full-on way. But there's a need for most people to practice and build on this knowledge. It is hard to put a finger on the precise numbers, because they are often run on an *ad hoc* basis and without formal documentation, but we know that this year around 160 parents and carers have been through a full SABL course within the county. As WE all know, the skills learned and practiced in this way may not be recalled until years later, so capturing parents at this stage is also having a big impact on society as a whole.

Several of you have been involved in SABL programmes, and I'd like us all to thank everyone who has, but especially, I'd like to acknowledge the contribution made by Alison Angiolini with this group. She has recently begun training very young (15 to 17yr old) mothers living in hostels. For some of them, the receipt of a SABL certificate and Community Life Support Award is the first educational achievement they have ever earned and, hopefully, represents a significant step in transforming their own lives. **Let's say thank you to all involved in the SABL programmes.**

One of my personal dreams for the Society in Surrey, is that every parent and carer of every baby should have access to infant and child CPR training. To do this calls for a coordinated effort. We have one young volunteer in Dorking waiting patiently to get on with this, I am very hopeful that one of the Branch Officers will step forward to help lead it.

As many of you know, Tina Marley single handedly manages our other main outreach activity - the Life Support courses for Cricket coaches. She is the epitome of the kind of volunteer I mentioned at the outset - rising above petty politics, getting on with the task in hand, and applying her professionalism to it. I discovered recently that we are one of the few Branches to champion this training, and that is down to Tina's passion and commitment. Drawing on the support of Tricia, Lucy, Billy, Luigi and Lee, the team have trained 405 coaches this year and have run 32 courses. **So, another big thank you to Tina and the team.**

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The feedback we receive from competitors is what a great time they have taking part in our Annual competition. We are slowly building the links to allow keen participants to join the squad trained by John Stainer in Sussex and so to go on to regional and national competitions. We have several people with a long track record of competitive life-saving in the Branch. We

know that competitive life-saving continues to grow in popularity and public awareness. It's time we saw the number of participants in our competition rise - it's good now, but it could be a LOT better.

The young members won't just turn up themselves - they need their Trainers and teachers to enthuse them. So, I'd like to appeal to you all, to think about ways of encouraging your club to enter one or more teams. If I was taking my child to a swimming pool, I'd want to know that the lifeguards were the best possible and what better indicator than to know that they were winners of a county competition? So, let's also do everything we can to persuade the pool operators of the PR-value and team-building potential from taking part too.

**Margaret Clifford, who has been quietly facilitating the event for the last four or five years is keen to take a quieter role still. I'd like to ask you to show our appreciation for the hard work that Margaret has put in, not only to the competition but to the Branch as a whole.**

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To repeat myself from last year, we have struggled in the past to decide how to award the Branch trophies - gathering statistics tends to mean lots of effort merely to confirm that the same group or club won them this year as last. We decided four years ago to invite applications for the trophies - this doesn't seem to have worked either. If you are involved in a club, school or leisure centre, PLEASE, take this seriously next year, make a genuine application and I'm sure your efforts will be rewarded.

Although it has taken longer than expected, I'm delighted to say that the Branch accounts are now being managed by River House on our behalf. This strengthens the controls over finances, reduces the effort that the Branch has to put in enormously, and means we get up to date reports when we need them. We are one of the more financially stable and cash rich regions in the Society and everyone would like to see these resources put to good use. Over the last five or six years we've constantly offered to help do anything to support the promotion of our aims. You only have to ask. If it's a course that needs subsidising, a problem with sudden changes in pool fees, travel costs for a team to go to a competition, promotional literature or signage, whatever - JUST ASK - we can't say NO if you don't ask, and there's always a chance we'll say YES!

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We're waiting eagerly for the new club to open in Guildford, which we hope will attract both younger members and the student population. Another TA is looking at opening a club in the Farnham area and just needs a little more local support and encouragement. And, we're delighted to formally welcome Yateley club who have now transferred to our Branch, strengthening our presence in the Western reaches of the county - they are a model to us all of the potential for growth having added SEVEN TAs to their staff in the last 12 months.

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The Society is constantly updating its awards and the ways in which it interfaces with members. It launched its new website recently which has a lot of useful material in the downloads section and good ways of promoting clubs and activities generally. If you haven't looked lately then please do so.

I must admit, I was a little chuffed when one of the delegates at the Annual Branch Conference last year, when asked about the RLSS UK site, said; "Well, if you need to see how it should be done, take a look at Surrey Branch's site - it's damned near perfect." Having a good site is one thing. It's getting people to look at it, by finding it on Google, that counts. We recently made some major changes to the nature of our site and I'm delighted to say that, if you do a search for most keywords associated with life-saving you'll find we dominate the front page. However, it needs a steady flow of material - every course you offer, every term date that you begin, every competition you enter, and so on - each of these is a great snippet for the site and sharing it will help everyone not just your own club. So PLEASE send us material!

We have also created a Facebook page which gives people much more immediate communication. It's easier to track interest and to pass on messages - so, again, please make us one of your Favourites, 'like' us, and let's spread the word even further.

Talking of spreading the word... A lot of Branches report that one of the difficulties they have is that, when someone makes an enquiry, they are met with a load of techno-babble about awards and acronyms, an assumption that they ought to know things already, and all too often an unfriendly and unsupportive voice. The same is often said by Trainers and Assessors, and it is well known that in some Branches cliques exist which upset people, lead to clubs folding, long standing members leaving, and so on.

The vast majority of general enquiries that come into our Branch, and most technical questions that arise, do so through the Branch Life-Saving Coordinators. Dave Bushen has indicated that is standing down as one of these this year. **But the Branch would simply not have achieved all that it has in recent years, if it wasn't for the extraordinary effort put in by Alison and Dave as Joint BLCs, so I'd like us all to express our appreciation.**

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 in which to live. Let's keep up the good work!

Thank you.

Graham Wilson.