

## Dictionary 4 Life

No-one seriously believes that the hundreds of books that we present each year as a gift to Primary school children in our area will live up to their title and last a lifetime, but perhaps such an expectation would be, in any case, a misinterpretation of the name 'Dictionary 4 Life'?

I much prefer to think that this project has an aim in common with all the other New Generation Rotary projects – to provide ways whereby young lives can be better prepared to take their place as useful and responsible members of adult society.

An unusual privilege is mine each Christmas when a very special email arrives in my Inbox. It comes from a group of men, now past retirement age, each one of whom was an 11 year old member of the very first class at the Lewes County Grammar School for Boys to have me as a Form Master back in 1960. No fewer than 28 of the original 36 are still in touch with each other and – to my great delight – still in touch with me. The news of families, of travel, and other minutia is of interest only amongst this little group but, for me, it epitomises everything that I have so much valued and enjoyed about being part of the world of education for so many years.

Human interaction through communication lies at the very heart of our existence. Wherever it is successfully accomplished, fun, laughter and great joy result and the world is generally a better place. Conversely, when it is neglected - or even abandoned - strife is the consequence at the domestic level, mistrust and even warfare result at the international level.

A real – and largely unrecognised – threat is growing up alongside the youngsters of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Our grandchildren, and even their parents, are in danger of spending more of their time interacting and communicating with electronic gadgetry than with their fellow human beings.

Over the years, our Club has established 3 projects aimed at providing benefit for young people. The first is our hugely successful involvement in Youth Speaks, the second is our annual gift of the Dictionary 4 Life, and the third – and most recent – is our Assisted Reading project. Do you notice that each of these projects has, at its core, the objective to enhance and improve standards of communication – either with the written word, or with the spoken word?

At each of the schools where we are now most welcome visitors there is much appreciation of our efforts to support and encourage pupils, and we now have a waiting list of schools hoping that we might soon have the necessary capacity to include them in our Assisted Reading project.

The cost of all these projects in financial terms is very modest. The Dictionary 4 Life and Youth Speaks *together* cost us in the region of £1000 each year. The main 'cost' is that of time. Chris Kinnear and Bill Cormie give generously of their time in dealing with the administration of Youth Speaks and the Dictionary 4 Life projects. The Assisted Reading project for Blackthorns and St Augustine's at present requires approximately 200 Rotarian hours a year.. For the 9 Rotarians and 1 wife involved, this means a manageable commitment of about 6 or 7 school visits of 1 hour in each school term. Just a few more volunteers willing to make a similar commitment would enable us to extend this programme further.

And the reward? Simply the intangible delight of watching children develop their skills in communication through reading, writing, speaking and listening. The Dictionaries might not last a lifetime, but participation in Youth Speaks and Assisted Reading will serve each youngster well and the use of words, written or spoken, will remain part of their experience – 4 Life!

**John Davey**