

Dictionary 4 Life

Each year as part of Rotary commitment to help young people in our area we give a copy of the "Dictionary 4 Life" to each pupil in a top year at primary schools. This is an illustrated dictionary of over 1,000 words, covering the base of the English language, with examples and diagrams in colour. In July we presented to six local junior schools. In all, 200 dictionaries were delivered to a variety of 10 to 11 year old pupils in either their last or penultimate year before going on to secondary education.

No-one seriously believes that the hundreds of books that we present each 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'?

We 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 for one Rotarian, John Davey, happens each Christmas when a very special email arrives in his 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 him as a Form Master back in 1960. No fewer than 28 of the original 36 are still in touch with each other and – to his great delight – still in touch with him. The news of families, of travel, and other minutia is of interest only amongst this little group but, for him, it epitomises everything 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 21st century. Our grandchildren, and even their parents, are in danger of spending more of their time interacting and communicating with electronic gadgetry than directly 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. Rotarians 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 Rotarians and others involved, this means a manageable commitment of about 8 or 9 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!

Letters from Blackthorns – 17 July 2014

At Blackthorns there were 35 pupils in year 5 for dictionaries, some of whom were also part of the Rotary Reading classes. At a tea time event for all those who helped Blackthorns this year, letters from year 5 were given to Rotary to say thank you for the dictionaries and the reading.

All the letters were interesting, charming in their simple open descriptions and reflect well on the various writers. A few of them are reproduced here.

John Davey & Chris Jupp

28 July 2014