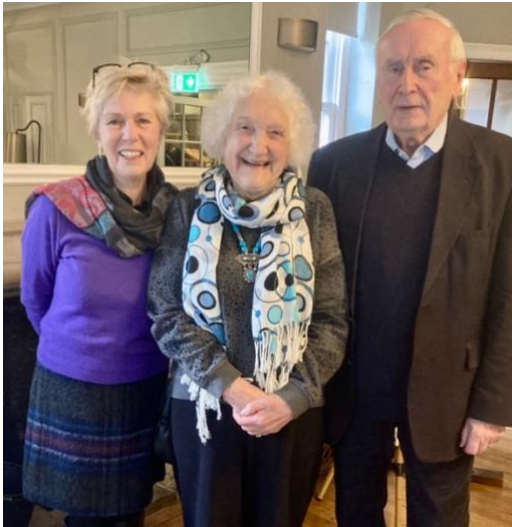


Newsheet November 2024

Talks Through November

Thursday 7th November

**Talk by Mrs Gill Cox leader of Farnham
Multi-cultural Reading Group**



Gill gave an inspiring talk on the work she has done and is doing supporting people new to this country with minimal language skills. The aim is primarily to reduce isolation, but also to teach English.

It all started because she experienced loneliness and isolation when in the 1960s she found herself in Canada with a 5 month old son when her husband's job took him there. Rather than welcoming her, the local people turned away on hearing her English accent.

When they returned to the UK after 3 years she found herself empathising with women who were clearly not native to the UK – she could sense their loneliness, their 'not-belonging'. She had had a common language whilst in Canada but these women did not. Over the next 50 years she had many contacts with people who were arriving in the UK, fleeing from war and tyranny. She said

her family felt their lives were enriched by the friendships that they made and they became part of their extended family. They moved to Farnham in 2007 and she volunteered for a while for the Conversation Club in Guildford run for 7 Syrian families recently arrived in the UK. She set up a small reading class with them – she would read a Ladybird book which they would then read back to a volunteer. One of the readers moved from Guildford to Farnham and it was Nazo who encouraged her to start a similar class in Farnham. So she did and it started in November 2021. She said, as an avid reader herself, she felt instinctively that reading out loud on a 1:1 basis was a good way of encouraging first of all confidence, secondly extension of vocabulary and general knowledge, and thirdly FUN, alongside meeting with others and having the opportunity to discuss anything that came up in the reading. No certificates are given out – it is a welcome for anyone whose first language is not English for a busy, fun-filled hour, followed by chatting over cups of tea.

Since 2021 they have met men and women from over 25 countries and the number of volunteers has increased to 13. Their skills are unique – some come with no English at all and they join the beginner's class. All their volunteers are DBS checked with training in safeguarding, all of which is supplied to them by the Spire Church. She added that they owe a huge debt to the Church for their support from the very beginning.

She said it can be difficult to reach those they want to help and unfortunately they have to say 'no' to pre-school children being present

as they are too much of a distraction. They have been successful in collecting a number of asylum seekers and refugees from Home Office hotels in Aldershot and Frimley Green from eg Namibia, Botswana, Rwanda and Eritrea. They have had residents from the Women's Refuge in Farnham – one of whom movingly said 'here, I feel free' – and have readers from the Ahmadiyya Moslem community and foreign students from UCA. One of the UCA students asked, as part of her Master's in Film Production, whether she could make a documentary about the group. This not only gave her a good degree but gave us all a very lasting and touching legacy of our work. Their Ukrainian students have become part of the family and it is thrilling to see them move on with work and a new life.

Their class is open every Tuesday morning, except for 2 weeks at Xmas and Easter and 4 weeks in August. A few weeks ago they had to move out of the Spire church because of a leak from the roofs and move into the Methodist Hall opposite. As this give them a lovely big, airy hall they are now meeting there regularly. At present they average 10/week but it varies and they never know how many might come so they have to be flexible. The hour session is from 10.15-11.15 and starts with a presentation on matters such as an exploration of words to do with 'the weather' or how to pronounce words ending in 'ed', as in 'pointed' or 'called', or maybe a chat about 'What the King does', or 'what is the difference between GB and UK'. She then divides up the readers and volunteers into pairs for their reading session. After the reading session, the volunteer fills in a short report on how the session went, so a record can be kept on progress, but there is tea or coffee and time

to chat before all leave with hugs and smiles. She then gave us some stories of her 'students':

Jessica from Mexico came because her English husband was worried about her as her English was not very good and she was having trouble finding a job. She now has a job in a local coffee shop and is virtually running it.

Jackie is from Namibia. They first met her at the Home Office hotel in Aldershot, from where she was moved to a hotel in Frimley Green. She had suffered years of abuse at home and was lucky to have someone who got her on a plane to the UK. She has been coming to the group for over 2 years. Whilst waiting for an interview in the hope of gaining asylum she was moved to a shared house in Portsmouth. Unfortunately her application was turned down, so last week she went to the appeal Tribunal and is now waiting for the result.

Kun is Chinese, studying graphic design at UCA. His English was terrible but he was incredibly motivated to improve, particularly as he loved living in Farnham, so they worked hard with him. However they haven't heard from him recently so fear he has been recalled home.

Nina & Kula are two very enterprising young friends from Greece. They now run B'Elicious a shop in South Street serving wonderful crepes and coffee.

She ended by saying that if we ever hear of anyone who we think might benefit from the group, we are to let her know.

Thursday 21st November

Talk by Kevin Mack, District Safeguarding Officer



He congratulated us on being a 'good' club in that we do our Risk Assessments and are seen as running our events responsibly.

Importantly, he mentioned that there has been a change in Kids Out. It had been contracted out but is now under Rotary's full control and will be called Rotary Children's Fun Day. The change had come about because there was no longer an alignment of values between the two organisations. Nothing else fundamentally will change – it will be run as before and take place in Aldershot.

He mentioned how we could support toy boxes for disadvantaged children, which are being organised by Kids in Mind. Rotary has so far donated £33,000 and a number of the clubs in our area within District have already contributed. Each box, which is gender and age specific costs £25.00 and contains £80.00 worth of toys.

Re compliance and safeguarding, for an event such as the Children's Fun Day, what is needed is the same as for a major event anywhere in the country. It will need an event plan (who does what) and an emergency plan – what to do if something goes wrong. Templates are on the Rotary GB&I website. He pointed out Rotary rarely needs DBS checks because of the way we organise our activities. We should, however, consider checking the Rotary insurance policy to ensure any planned event is covered. Regarding collections, he pointed out that whilst we are allowed to carry £1,000 on our person, we can only have £500 in our own houses. Clearly this has to be born in mind eg for street collections.

He referred to GDPR and the importance of using 'blind copy' when circulating information or messages to a number of individuals outside of the District. Within District we all agreed to share our personal information amongst other Rotarians in the District when we joined.

Finally he drew our attention to be aware of diversity and cultural differences within our community and potential membership.

Thursday 28th November

Talk by Elizabeth Newson, Chair of Talking News Farnham, introduced by Rotary Member Richard Drummond



Richard said he got to know Elizabeth through working with Talking News for a number of years. A number of other members know her also as she has been an adjudicator at our Youth Speaks events. Because of this she said she 'feels the pressure'. She has been Involved with Talking News for 20 years or more and has been Chair for a long time. She then read a poem written by someone's whose friend became blind – called 'The Unbelievable - Leonard'.

'It has happened to me – the unbelievable. These things happen to others but not to me, not to me. Yet I must believe the darkness – the blotting out of the light. I know I am blind. Sometimes I shut my eyes and think it is a dream. Soon I will wake up and see the light coming shining through the window. The sun not only warm on my hands; the flowers more than scent. Today I think I will paint or mend that broken chair or maybe weed the garden, or drive into town and watch the world go by, but no my eyes are open now but they do not see. It could be night or day or twilight time. The unbelievable has happened to me. I use my stick to prod the earth, to find my way I have the doors to recognise each room. I am not patient - never was, but this I must also learn amongst the simple things, which now to me are difficult to do. The worse I find is dependence on others, still with that desire to be myself and need no other aid. So, I must learn humility, accept the proffered arm, the guiding arm and know that those who offer me this help do so in friendship - certainly with love.

It has happened to me – the unbelievable. I am blind. My mind can see – maybe more vividly

than many sighted do so now I rely on mental vision and find that there is much in life to give me joy, not least my family and my friends who keep me sane.

Theirs are my eyes and my guiding hand. I can go on, for just my eyes are blind.'

It is a lovely and very moving poem, and she said she hoped it helped to make us realise how lucky we all are. And I think it did just that.

Talking newspapers exists to stimulate the minds of those who cannot read because of loss of sight, and to keep them in touch continuously with the world around them. For, as she said, if we all closed our eyes now, we would realise the loss in not being able to see the room or people and we would feel very isolated. We, in Talking News, want to bring the outside world to these people so they not only know what is going on, but they can talk about it to their friends, and more.

Before she told us something about them in Farnham, she told us a little bit about the history of Talking News. We learnt that Farnham is the oldest Talking Newspaper in the country and has been going for 52 years – 2 years ago they celebrated their 50th year celebration – really exciting. It started many years ago by Richard Sturt who went to Sweden and there he discovered that someone had started recording the news for those with impaired vision. Coming back, he was very inspired and so tried to start it in Aberystwyth. Patricia Stokes, who lived in Farnham and had impaired vision, visited Richard in Wales. She came back to Farnham inspired and through her many contacts, including RNIB, she raised money and started in a very small way. The first studio she had was under the dining room of Abbeyfield House. They had to move the dining table for them to go down into and come out of the cellar. They used the music from an old cigar box and it took 3 hours or more to produce the recording. To start with it was a very small group of people, but with

expansion it moved to Phyllis Tuckwell, the Gurkhas – all sorts of places where they could find a place in which to work. The last place before they moved to where they are now was The Maltings up to the renovation in the early 2000s. They found enthusiasm for the service and could ask for recruits via the GP's in the early days, but now of course they cannot because of GDPR. It was a bequest of about £40,000 which enabled them to open their own studios in the Channies – a disused storage space. Redecorated the now have a wonderful space with wonderful equipment. They record the local news with support from the Farnham Herald who give their newspapers free – they pay for Fleet ones. They started with just Farnham & Alton and because of this were called 'Farnham and Alton Talking Newspaper'. Soon after moving to the Channies, when doing a street collection someone asked why they should give as Haslemere, where they lived, wasn't covered. But actually it was, so they changed their name to Talking News covering the Surrey and Hampshire borders but kept the FATN. Before lockdown they had 4 editions covering Farnham, Haslemere, Hindhead, Alton, Bordon and Fleet. During lockdown they continued and made use of Alexa via their website. Following lockdown, as there are now only 3 pages with local news in the Herald, they just do 2 recordings/week – Farnham and Haslemere and Fleet and Camberley.



Offices in the Channies

All of what they do is self-funded – they receive no support from grant-making trusts or local authorities. They have about 70 volunteers doing about 4 hours/month and have 3 different teams – readers and editors cutting out the articles and editing them. They want listeners to have a flavour of the news and know as much as possible about

what is going on. They have a team of engineers – a great number of qualified technical people. The third team is the 'backstage crew' – they put all the recordings onto a memory stick which is then sent out to all the listeners in a pouch. Due to Richard Sturt's initial work all deliveries remain free via the Post Office. In the early years the recordings were on a cassette and then on a CD, but sadly with the latter they lost a lot of listeners as not all had CD players – also they couldn't recycle the CDs. And so now they use memory sticks which can be re-used and are sent out in pouches – red for Farnham, black for Fleet. The labels just have to be turned over to enable them to be returned via the free post. And they give all their listeners a free machine which they are shown how to use. They chose black and yellow as these colours can be most readily seen by those with impaired vision. It is a very simple machine to use and they have a special way to enable them to identify how to put the memory stick in correctly.

The news is divided into sections: news, what's on, more news, death page and lastly the sport. The service enables them all to share what is going on with their friends and relatives.

Asked two favours – spread the word (also of help to those who have problems holding the newspaper); and consider giving them a donation as their funds only come from generous organisations and bequests.

Messages from users: 'it is so good to know what is going on in the area. My sincere thanks to you all - you are such caring people for giving so much of you time to people in similar circumstances to me.' 'My sincere thanks to all the lovely people involved in the production and recording of events. They fill me with so much information'. 'Thank you and your colleagues for the excellent service you give to us. It is much appreciated'. 'My mother is housebound and thoroughly enjoys the Talking Newspaper each week.' 'I enjoy and appreciate all your contributions to the recordings. What a godsend you are.' 'Great to know what is going on in the area so thank you for giving me the opportunity to get to know.'

Carried Forward from October Talk Thursday 31st October Paul Fry, Rotary member, on media overview

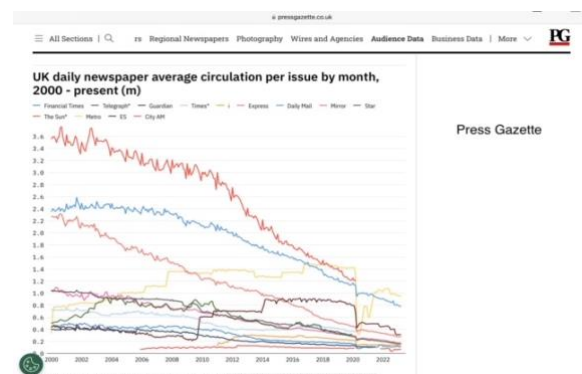
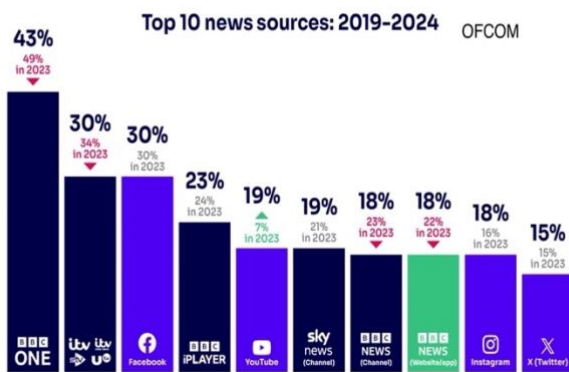
Paul explained that when working he had dealt with every kind of media in UK and around the world and had had a huge PR & marketing budget within his control.

He talked about how news outlets and where we get our news from has changed significantly over recent years and how this was continuing to change. The Herald has traditionally been a major media outlet for us and many other similar organisations in the town. However, today the reality is that it plays a fairly minor part in imparting news. Its circulation is a little over 5,000 copies across Alton, Liphook, Bordon, Farnham & Haslemere, the total population of which is about 120,000, with Farnham being about 40,000. Therefore, a relatively small number of people are buying it and these are not necessarily or potentially the audience we need to reach to recruit new members. They do post a lot online but he did not know how many make use of this facility. He wasn't saying we should ignore the Herald as an outlet for new but that we have to understand the context of the importance of it and confirmed it is good to have good relationships with key people within it.

He had been asked if could support the centenary celebrations. He had drawn up two press releases – one focussing on our service to the community, the other on the letter from Buckingham Palace. He was conscious it would not be good to portray us as a group of wealth people and so did not include any photographs of the banquet itself.

He shared the outcome of an Ofcom survey of news sources, which shows the top 10 are and a graph showing the decline of newspaper circulations:

Top 10 news sources revealed



Whilst 43% trust BBC 1 for our news the percentage had fallen from the previous year, with similar declines in other news outlets. He pointed to the fact that U-tube has had the most significant increase with a massive growth from 7% in 2023 to 19% in 2024. But generally the march of alternative media across the globe is obvious, with videos, or reels, becoming increasingly popular with them now on the websites of the Guardian and Telegraph. And though Twitter is only 15% it is the most downloaded news app in the whole world.

Trends re daily newspaper circulations show all are falling eg the circulation of the Sun has fallen from 3.6m circulation tot under m in 20 years, and large number of local newspapers are going out of business, with 25 lost last year. He also told us that trustworthiness is changing – whilst over 60% find

BBC and ITV trustworthy 63% choose online channels. Also younger people are finding sources less trustworthy and as he said we do have to recognise the bias in our news – the tendency is that only one side is covered.

Where we do go with this and how do we participate? If we were doing this professionally we would be using a large number of tools but there is always the question ‘how do we know it’s working?’. Recently Rotary International posted on ‘X’ ‘about world polio day – it got viewed 43,000 times around the world and was ‘liked’ about 200 times– what does this mean? It could be it doesn’t reflect the reality of the response as the interactions with the advertising could well have had an influence.

But whatever, any interaction with social media has to be regular and frequent. When doing research for this talk he said he came across lots of sites where nothing had been posted for a number of years. It was noted that we might expect Rotary to do more at district, national and international levels on social media, but also that you have to have something to say and a hook on which to hang any ‘news’. Our most successful ‘campaign’, which was via twitter, was bikes for Africa, for which we had up to 4,000 contacts. He said we do not do Facebook. It was also noted that having a good website might help us re recruitment, as people who are interested in Rotary are likely to go to the main website and be directed from there to local ones.

The Environment

Repair Café, 10.00 am 14th December Spire Church

Say ‘no’ to plastic for Xmas

Look out for our plastic free champions when buying presents

Say ‘no’ to annoying plastic toys in crackers or make your own

Avoid the use of cellotape

Say ‘no’ to plastic Xmas decorations

Avoid plastic in Xmas presents as much as possible



Events Through December

Sunday 8th December – Stall in Farnham Xmas Market

Wednesday 11th December – Carol Service St Joans Church 6.30 pm

Thursday 12th December – Goodwill Xmas lunch

Friday 13 & Saturday 21st – Street Collections

Thursdays 19th & 26th – no meeting

If, as a Friend, you are interested in coming along to any of the talks and for lunch (£22) please email lunches@rotaryfarnham.co.uk on the Monday before, saying whether you would like fish, meat or vegetarian, pudding or fresh fruit. We start gathering at The Bush, Farnham from 12.30 pm for lunch at 1.00pm with the talk at 2.00 pm, finishing at 2.30pm.