

SPEAKING OUT IN ROTARY AND PROBUS CLUBS

Approaching Rotary and Probus Clubs - by Leys Geddes, with a report from Norbert Lieckfeldt

Rotary Clubs

Leys Geddes has spoken in a number of Rotary Clubs, and writes:

Rotary Clubs are very good places to speak out. Their members tend to be older and more understanding, they share our belief in the benefits of public speaking, they have a tradition of supporting worthy causes and, very often, they contribute financially to charities. The friendly and supportive environment of a local Rotary Club makes it the ideal place for someone who stammers to take a first step into the world of speaking out.



To find your local club, go to <http://www.ribi.org/club-search>.

All clubs have a Speakers' Secretary, who is responsible for arranging for speakers to come and speak to members. The Secretaries often arrange speakers up to a year in advance but, equally, are often caught short, and need a speaker to fill a sudden hole which might have appeared in the schedule. Many clubs have their own websites which will give details of all the officers of the club, including the Speakers' Secretary. If possible, contact him or her directly, by phone, email or letter. If no details are given of the Speakers' Secretary, contact any of the other officers and ask for a message to be passed on.

Explain that you would like to talk about stammering and that you are a member of the British Stammering Association, a registered charity. You might also mention that around 720,000 people in the UK stammer (they will be surprised by the number) and that there are many misconceptions about the condition – such as it being caused by nervousness or trauma – but we are actually perfectly normal and intelligent people who can't always control our speech. It might well be useful to mention The King's Speech, because it provides a mutual reference point and all the older Rotary members will have very clear memories of King George VI. You should also add in some personal experience of stammering which has encouraged you to talk about it.

Very few clubs have a permanent home or clubhouse, so they tend to hold weekly meetings at a local pub, club or hotel. Around 20 to 30 members usually attend. Not every meeting has a speaker, as they have club business to discuss. Meetings may be held in the evening, around midday or around breakfast. As a result, if you go as a speaker, you will usually get a very decent free supper, lunch or breakfast. You would normally speak for about 20 to 30 minutes, followed by questions.

If you would like to know more, go to the BSA site at <http://www.stammering.org> and search for 'Rotary'.

A basic presentation you might like to look at, either as a guide to what to say, or as a PowerPoint presentation (when that is appropriate) can be found at <http://www.stammering.org/spout>

Probus Clubs

You might also consider talking at Probus Clubs, which are sponsored by Rotary clubs. Probus is an acronym for Pro(fessional) and Bus(iness). They are similar to Rotary Clubs in many ways. An invitation from a Probus Club may well follow an invitation from the sponsoring Rotary. See <http://www.ukprobus.org> for more information.

Norbert Lieckfeldt tells us about a recent visit to a Probus Club

(This is a reproduction of his Facebook posting)

My Probus Club talk went quite well. In my experience they're always fairly chuffed when someone comes along to talk to them. Though when the Chair introduced me and said I was going to talk about stammering, one wit (in his late 80s) turned around and said "Wh-wh-wh-what?". Tough crowd, I thought.



But as always, once you talk about stammering, and especially once you talk about your own experiences and what it's been like for you, they wake up (even after a boozy lunch in a sunny room) and you get their attention. You have to tailor it to the audience a bit and as the average age of my audience on that particular day was about 84 years, a few references to the late King went down well and I went easy on the science bits.

The main thing is always, I find, to get them to empathize and realise, with a few examples, that living your life with a stammer can be hard. I think I managed that and the Chair confessed to me afterwards that I must have done well, because for the first time in quite a few months, no-one fell asleep during the talk.

It's also important to allow questions after your talk - I had eight questions which was a lot, but there is always a lot of interest – and let's face it when will they ever have the chance to ask someone who stammers about stammering?

All in all, a very enjoyable way to spend your lunch time.