

Mark Dowie: New Year message 2020

Thursday 2 January 2020

Happy New Year and welcome back! I hope you have managed to have a good break and feel rested and ready for the year ahead.

For many of you, the last 8 months have been spent preparing and getting ready for 2020. We have made some difficult decisions, all in the best interests of the RNLI, and have had to say goodbye to some valued colleagues and friends. We have had to work and think differently so that we can operate with maximum efficiency and we will need to continue to do this going forwards.

We've put out our biggest fundraising appeal ever, Perfect Storm, launched a memory on the Invergordon Shannon, dealt with our own media storm and set up a new regional structure so we can better support people and our lifesaving and fundraising activities. And above all we have saved hundreds of lives, and assisted thousands of people at sea, on beaches, on lakes and rivers. Our water safety work has reached hundreds of thousands and our international advocacy and projects have been making a huge difference in the cause of saving lives overseas. You have all achieved a very great deal in 2019.

In 2020, we are going to reinforce two important shifts in our thinking.

Firstly, we are one crew. We are not 'staff and volunteers', not 'Poole and the coast', not 'operations and fundraising' instead we are one joined up team, powered by passion, talent and kindness. Everyone is valuable and we're all working together towards a shared goal. We are all on the same team – one crew.

Secondly, this is our watch. It's our time. Like generations of lifesavers before us, it's our job to keep our charity safe and secure for the next 200 years so that it can continue to save lives and remain loved and treasured by so many. This means doing the right thing for the RNLI. It means recognising the impact of our actions and words on our organisation and being responsible for this wonderful charity.

It also means preparing for the future. By modernising, pushing the boundaries and exploring new ways we can save lives. By enriching our charity with people from every background and experience possible, valuing and respecting everyone as we would expect to be valued and improving the breadth and depth of our RNLI family.

So, what does this mean for all of us?

It means that 2020 is the time for a new start whether you are a volunteer or staff member, at one of our regional bases, at a lifeboat station, on beaches, in a fundraising branch or in the Support Centre in Poole. This is the time to take greater responsibility and do your job to the best of your ability. Everything matters, no stone must rest unturned and we all need to just get the job done – early if we can. It means trusting and respecting each other and helping the RNLI move forward, not trying to hold onto the past. Let's also get better at celebrating the things we have achieved.

Looking back at 2019

My first 8 months have been filled with challenges but also with moments of fun, surprise and even joy. Stepping down as lifeboat operations manager (LOM) and leaving Salcombe behind in May was a tear so it was a great pleasure to return in September to accompany our President, HRH The Duke of Kent, to mark 150 years of Salcombe RNLI. And I also managed to get to Wells-next-the-Sea's 150th in July, another wonderful community occasion.

The launch afloat of the relief Shannon, Bridie O'Shea, was a very special day at Poole and I was also able to attend the naming ceremony for Skegness Lifeboat Station's D Class, the Holland Family, in November.

It has been a great pleasure and honour to be able to present many long-service awards and certificates to volunteers and staff who have made an extraordinary commitment to our charity over many years. Especially notable was the award to Colonel David Hannah made at Dart Lifeboat Station in October. David has made a massive contribution to our fundraising in the South West. And meeting Joan Webb, the 100-year-old Basingstoke Branch fundraiser, who was invited to the bell ringing ceremony for Rhyl Lifeboat Station's new Shannon, was a great honour for me. Joan has been raising funds for the RNLI since she was 6 years old.

In all in 2019, I managed to visit 26 lifeboat stations, 12 beaches and three of the six regional bases. A busy year of travel but I hope to do more in 2020 so that I can meet as many of you as possible, see what you are doing and hear your ideas and suggestions.

Learning facts and enjoying curiosities have also marked my first few months:

- Tighnabruaich Lifeboat Station decided together to turn off the lights every time they weren't in the building and they have saved 48% of their electricity bill. A lesson for all of us?
- The [giant rubber duck raising money](#) on the Thames making a statement during Henley Regatta.
- The [twin sisters who were rescued](#) from their inflatable unicorn that was blown out to sea.
- The roll-out of Helly Hansen personal protective equipment (PPE), with Salcombe RNLI being the last all-weather lifeboat station to receive the new kit.
- We've been recording audio versions of our quarterly membership magazine, Lifeboat, for almost 15 years. More recently, we've been working with RNIB to record audio pages so all supporters can enjoy our stories.
- Visiting The Historic Dockyard in Chatham and witnessing first-hand the pride and enthusiasm of the team there. This year the team has logged a staggering 2,200 hours maintaining the exhibits and engaging with visitors.
- The 12-month project [Forgotten Photos of the RNLI](#) focused on a collection of more than 13,500 press photos.
- A record year for face-to-face sign-ups with over 19,000 new supporters.

- The average viewing figures for each episode of BBC Saving Lives at Sea were 1.7M!
- My [visit to Wicklow Lifeboat Station](#) in August and the delicious jar of jam I received from one of the volunteers.
- The Launch a Memory campaign – including my parents' names on the new Invergordon Shannon. I'm looking forward to seeing her at the station in 2020.

The 2020 kick-off event

On 29 January, I am hosting a [2020 kick-off event](#). You should all have now received an email invitation for this event. It is going to be a live-streamed and filmed evening event so that everyone, whether you're a volunteer or staff member, can dial in to watch it live or catch up with the filmed version the next day. At the kick-off event I will be sharing our vision and intent for the next few years.

In the meantime, I realise that you are coming back to a reshaped RNLI. The next 3 weeks should give you the time to find out who your new contacts and colleagues are and get ready to kick off the New Year as one crew at the end of the month. 2020 will be about making it all happen, riding the minor bumps in the road and just getting on with delivering the service our charity exists for.

Finally, as we start a new year and a new decade, I challenge you all to decide what you are going to leave behind in 2019 and what you will bring into 2020 to make this your best RNLI year yet.

With very best wishes and a happy New Year,

Mark