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ESSEX: Stammerers applaud film *The King's Speech* for portrayal of condition



SUPPORT: Stammerers meet to discuss *The King's Speech*

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RONNIE Barker in *Open All Hours* or Michael Palin in *A Fish Called Wanda* – stammerers have never had an easy ride on the screen.

But now a new film has got Essex stutterers talking positively about their depiction in the media.

The Essex Support Group, a dedicated team helping stammerers overcome their condition, has said Colin Firth's portrayal of King George VI in *The King's Speech* has finally banished the image of the stuttering buffoon.

Barry Rix, 54, founder of the group which almost cured his stammer using the same technique that helped the king, said: "All stammerers can relate to the pressure the king was under, the merciless teasing and bullying.

"But if the film changes the attitudes and helps people understand the difficulties faced by stammerers, that is wonderful."

Now he wants other stammerers in Essex to get in touch and start managing their condition.

He also praised the techniques of Lionel Logue, the king's therapist; techniques that have helped Barry and his colleagues manage their speech impediments.

The self-employed father-of-two started the group nine years ago after attending a course that taught Logue's methods.

"I had almost given up. My stammer became so bad I bought train tickets to stations I could say rather than wanted to go to.

"But then I attended the Starfish residential course and was not only taught Logue's breathing techniques but positive attitude development."

Most stammerers, he said, have to unlearn years of avoiding certain situations and words as well as build up confidence knocked by bullying and self-loathing.

This approach is evident in the film as Logue becomes King George's de facto psychologist as well as his speech therapist.

Group member Nicola Grainger, 30, used to avoid saying her name but now says the course and ongoing free support has given her the confidence to use the telephone.

The social worker from Chelmsford said: "I chose jobs that didn't involve the telephone so I did a lot of boring admin.

"But the support of the group gave me the confidence to do a masters and pursue a career in social work."

Now the group is hoping the film will encourage other stammerers in Essex to get in touch.

Richard Gooding, 37, a graphic designer from Chelmsford, said: "I can't remember an event that has made stammering so high profile.

"Logue made the difference t and helped the king find his voice after he had all but given up."

The team say they hope their group are able to do something similar in Essex.

If you would like to know more visit the group's umbrella organisation, the Starfish Project, at www.starfishproject.co.uk or call Barry Rix on 01245 355 655.