

Summer 2016



# Warwickshire Vision

## Big Lottery Fund Supports New Services



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**VS**  
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**Warwickshire Vision Support**

Your Local Charity for Local People



Rosemary Went, Editor



Rosalie Visick, Co-editor

## Editorial

This year Spring seemed to start early, but then both the weather and temperature fluctuated considerably from day to day. What will this summer bring?

This magazine brings news of new staff members, new IT opportunities for people living in more rural areas of our county and an expansion of our Hospital Advice Desk service, offering earlier help for people learning of a visual impairment. Volunteers are also featured as well as sight related matters.

Clubs have celebrated our Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Official celebrations ended in June. The Duke of Edinburgh also celebrated his 95<sup>th</sup> Birthday

The inclusion of driverless cars in the Queen's Speech seems to bring them ever closer to our front doors. This

technology is already being tested in Coventry.

A driver who recently sat in the driving seat of such a vehicle said he only needed to flick the indicator switch to indicate the wish to change driving lanes for the vehicle to do so safely without any further human intervention or involvement. This test drive took place on the M25! Perhaps driverless cars mean that in the foreseeable future our roads could be safer without the opportunity for human error.

We thank our contributors to this issue. Items for a Christmas edition of Warwickshire Vision are needed by 18<sup>th</sup> September.

We hope you enjoy a pleasant summer and would be delighted to hear from you at any time.

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# News from Warwickshire Vision Support

## *New Staff*



### **Felicity Kirby**

Hello! I'm Felicity and I am one of the new Community Workers for WVS. I'm excited about the challenges I'll come across in this role and how much I will learn. Everyone has a story to share and everyone can contribute to making a difference, so I'm looking forward to hearing what you have to say when I meet you at clinics, clubs and Vision Support Centres.

My background is within healthcare; I trained as a midwife in Wales and worked at Warwick Hospital for a time. However, I left the profession because I felt the fundamental reason I had trained as a midwife was no longer a part of the job. Staffing and budget cuts meant there was little time to build a relationship with clients. So I have turned my attention to a more 'social health' career and I think charitable organisations like WVS provide vital services to

improve social wellbeing. I'm starting a Master's degree in Public Health this autumn where my focus will very much be on social health.

I became interested in visual impairments and how they can affect day-to-day living when I met my partner over three years ago. He has a diagnosis of Retinitis Pigmentosa so I've spent a lot of time researching, reading people's stories, and finding out what services are available when we need them. I discovered a group which assists blind and partially sighted people to ski abroad, which is awesome as it's one of his favourite pastimes!

Myself, I'm more of a home bird; my family sometimes calls me 'Jane Austen' because I love reading, creative writing, sewing, classical music, walking, visiting stately homes, crocheting and baking. My other loves are horse-riding and singing. I've been fortunate to volunteer with some brilliant charities throughout the years which have allowed me to use my personal interests and skills to benefit others – things like animal-assisted therapy for children with autism, and performing concerts for in-patients at a hospital.

I live in Coventry with my partner and our two rescue bunnies (which I dote on!).



## Helen McGlone

What a wonderful opportunity to introduce myself. I am Helen, a newly appointed Community Worker for Warwickshire Vision Support.

My original plan in life was to join the Royal Navy, but it wasn't to be. Sailing was nothing but a hobby ... a difficult hobby for a land-locked Coventry girl, so naturally I had to venture out into the world alone and at times, quite literally, sail the seas. I kept journals and wrote poetry of all my travels and sailing ventures and was fortunate enough to have small pieces published many moons ago.

I graduated from Coventry University 3 years ago with a degree in Psychology. My dissertation allowed me to reach out to local charities for Veterans of the Armed Forces. This is something I am very passionate about and volunteered with them for a short time on completion of my degree.

Since then, I have worked as a volunteer for a local charity that specialises in ABI (Acquired Brain

Injury). I have also worked as a rehab support worker, specialising in Autism, mental health problems and learning disabilities. I am hoping that my previous experience will be of some use within my role, although I am looking forward to the challenges ahead and the potential to develop my knowledge.

My time at home is spent predominantly with my partner and my daughter. Katie, aged 10, is currently learning to play the drums and I am enjoying her attempts to deafen me on a daily basis with the latest song she has learnt. As for myself, my musical talent isn't quite so extraordinary, however, I love to sing. I have a small, but ever-growing, record collection. The crackle of the record player sounds so much better than a CD. Needless to say, neither my daughter or myself are very popular with the neighbours.

During the weekend I am out enjoying the beautiful countryside of Warwickshire. I have managed to find a few hidden coffee shops so I have tips on where to get a nice slice of cake! My love of cake does, unfortunately, mean that I must exercise. I am a member of a local gym where I get put through my paces. Other than that I take walks and go cycling in Warwickshire.

I am looking forward to getting to meet people over the next few months and settling into my new role as a Community Worker.



## ***New Services at George Eliot Hospital***

Some of you may be aware that over the last few months we have set up an Advice Desk at George Eliot Eye Clinic. Open for just a couple of hours a week to offer support and guidance to local visually impaired people, this pilot project was designed to ascertain what level of demand there is for our services in the area.

Now, thanks to a grant of £122,693 over three years from the Big Lottery Fund, we are going to operate a brand new service for people newly diagnosed with sight loss or for those who simply wish to reacquaint themselves with what services and support are available to them in Nuneaton and North Warwickshire.

We are calling this new service 'My Sight'. We have funding to operate the Advice Desk for up to 3 days each week. This means that our service can be integrated with that of the hospital (part of the eye care pathway).

New Medica runs the Eye Clinic and we have agreed with them that anyone who may benefit from Warwickshire Vision Support's services will be automatically referred to the Advice Desk. This means that from day one, people diagnosed with sight loss will have a point of contact where they can get information and advice.

# **My Sight**

Learning to live with sight loss

In addition to this, we will be holding weekly My Sight meetings. These meetings will give access to a host of information that can increase independence and confidence and help individuals to remain integrated members of the local community. We are planning to recruit visually impaired volunteer mentors who can support this process, sharing their experiences, providing advice and support. All group members will have an opportunity to share experiences with their fellow VIPs.

We will have a timetable of subjects that will be repeated throughout the year. You will be able to attend one or more sessions of particular interest or all of them – the choice is yours. We know that each of you has different interests and different needs – we want you to decide what is important to you.

The sessions will be based around the following areas with each session reflecting the needs and expectations of that particular group:

- Eye conditions – what to expect in the future
- Rehabilitation services – how to maintain confidence and independence
- Training and adult education – making the most of the future

- Employment and benefits – addressing financial wellbeing
- Equipment – demonstrations of useful devices
- Local services – referrals to befriending services, clubs, sports groups etc.

We believe that this exciting new service will help people who have recently been diagnosed with sight loss to adjust to their new lifestyle - making the most of their future. My Sight groups are open to anyone living with sight loss – just pop in to the Nuneaton Vision Support Centre for information or call us on **01926 411331**.

### ***New Services in Stratford***

We are also very pleased to announce that Stratford Town Trust has awarded a grant of £8,450 to establish a part-time Advice Desk at the new Stratford Hospital when it opens at the end of the year. It is our hope to introduce a similar My Sight programme to that available in Nuneaton if we can secure additional funding.



**Rebecca Hunt, IT Officer**

In a world full of Twitter and YouTube, Microsoft, Apple and Android it's extremely easy to become confused about what Information Technology

(IT) is or how IT can be used in anyone's daily life. Living with deteriorating sight or lack of sight in our already over-busy world, the whole concept of IT can feel too big and too complicated. Taking the first step into using IT can be frightening and for some the terminology can be complex and difficult to understand. Warwickshire Vision Support offers an IT4U service at its Vision Support Centres to help support you to find a way through the IT maze.

If you want to explore what's available, how it works and have a play with a new device – a phone, tablet or laptop - in a friendly, informal atmosphere, have an opportunity to receive clear unbiased advice on what suits your vision, your aims and of course your pocket, then IT4U can help.

Any training will be tailored to your needs, whether it's learning how to email, using Skype to talk to your family and friends who live some distance away, or perhaps saving some money by shopping on line or switching your utility provider.

WVS has been running IT Training for the last 3 years but recognises that for some people getting to a Vision Support Centre is difficult, perhaps because of the distance, lack of transport or other mobility issues. In order to help address this, WVS has been awarded a Grant from the Stratford District Council Digital Inclusion Fund 2015 to offer free IT

training to visually impaired people in Stratford District, in particular more rural and hard to reach areas.

We are setting up 6-week courses at venues across Stratford District to offer introductory sessions and further learning opportunities to meet this need. A programme of sessions is being planned, to include Shipston on Stour, Studley and Southam. Other areas will be included but have yet to be confirmed.

If you are interested in finding out more, making friends and a whole lot more, why not call us to find out the time and venue of your local training session. Alternatively, you can pop into to see us at the Christadelphian Church on Rother Street in Stratford-upon-Avon between 10 am and 12 noon any Tuesday to have a cup of tea, see our range of demonstration equipment and talk with our IT Team.

For more information please call **01926 411331**.



## ***General Meeting – 18th April***

### **Leamington Vision Support Centre**

Kath Phelps (Secretary) chaired WVS's fourth General Meeting; previous meetings had been held in different towns in our county. There were 45 people present, which included four Trustees/Directors and Staff - John Davis, Manager, Barbara Main, Administration Officer, Vicky Lewis, Rehabilitation Assistant, Rebecca Hunt, IT Officer, Sue Morris, Community Worker and Kelly Sowter, Rehabilitation Officer - plus Volunteers and Members.

John Davis, Manager, reported that there had been a number of staff changes in the past 12 months.

Fundraising has enabled our attendance at the Warwick Hospital Eye Clinic to be increased from two to four ½ day sessions a week, enabling better links to be forged with staff and patients.

There will be an Advice Desk set up at Rugby Hospital from June, which will focus on the Glaucoma Clinic.

John reported that a new group had been established to help VI children. This is called the 'I Sight Support Forum'. It includes Eye Clinic Staff, Education and local charities.

Steve Plumpton, together with Philip Austin, facilitate the Advocacy Group which has been dealing with obstructions on pavements etc. Different tiers of local Councils have responsibility for different aspects.



A Street Charter is being drawn up, with the help of RNIB which it is hoped the County and District Councils will agree to.

From August we will have a presence at the George Eliot hospital in Nuneaton with a Vision Support Desk there for three days a week, providing an advice service at the eye clinic. This is funded for the next 3 years by a lottery grant. In addition there will be a support group for newly visually impaired people in the Nuneaton area.

The rehabilitation contract from Warwickshire County Council is being put out to tender and we have to submit our application. It has caused a certain amount of uncertainty among staff.

There are very few places where Rehabilitation Officers can be trained, so we are involved in setting up an apprenticeship scheme for training new rehabilitation officers, which will enable us to train our own staff.

York University is doing research into the effects of rehab and we have been invited to contribute. The research will look at the cost of rehabilitation work and compare it with the costs incurred when rehabilitation is not made available.

Rebecca Hunt, IT Officer, now runs the IT service at the Vision Support Centres. She spoke about her previous IT experience and the IT

services that have been provided, which included:

- Setting up Skype – enabling blind people living alone to talk to relatives as far away as Australia
- Helping with phones – particularly mobile phones
- Introducing computers to new users
- Helping with changing energy suppliers online

Money has been donated by Stratford District Council to help improve IT support services in the south of the county, particularly in the more rural areas. This has enabled us to form a relationship with the Library Service to set up 'pop up' IT support sessions in rural areas. Further information about these is available at the Vision Support Centres where appointments for these sessions can be made.

## Questions

A Volunteer who was visiting a lady living in a flat with a damp problem asked - could we help with poor living conditions?

John promised to visit the person concerned and recommend housing needs. In general, these types of problems are dealt with by Social Services.

What does the Advocacy Group do? Could it help with the above question?

The Advocacy Group is dealing with issues such as blocked pavements and attempting to get councils to change legislation. It doesn't deal with individual cases.

(There were a number of other comments/questions relating to blocked pavements.)

Would having apprentices require a greater time commitment from staff?

It was felt that the advantages gained from having an apprentice would outweigh the extra input needed from staff.

The Secretary asked where attendees had come from, to ascertain whether it was worth inviting people from the whole of Warwickshire to general meetings in future. They had come from Nuneaton, Coleshill and Rugby as well as the more local areas.

Kath invited the Trustees/Directors to tell the attendees about the experience which they brought to the Board.

- Jeff Perry spoke of his experience in financial services.
- Philip Austin had worked as a solicitor.
- Rosemary Went had been a staff member at WAB some years ago.
- Heather Fairbairn had been co-opted onto the Board and had moved from engineering to education, where she had experience of apprenticeships.

- Kath Phelp's own experience was from researching at the Horticultural Research Station.

Stan Newton, who is a Member, gave a vote of thanks to all the Volunteers who help us provide our Community Services.

## ***Fundraising Report***

**Phil Arkell**, Fundraising Manager

Of course the big news is that we have been awarded a grant from the Big Lottery Fund of over £122,000 over 3 years to establish the new Advice Desk and My Sight group at Nuneaton's George Eliot Hospital and a grant for £8,450 from Stratford Town Trust to set up an Advice Desk at the new Stratford Hospital when it opens.

We have also secured grants from many other trusts and foundations in support of our charitable activities:

- The Home Visitor Service has received grants including a £9,000 grant over 3 years from the Sheldon Trust as well as a further £2,500 from the Francis Wynham Foundation and £500 each from the William Cadbury Charitable Trust and the George Henry Collins Charity.
- We have also been lucky enough to have secured funding for the purchase of three wireless hearing loops for use in our Vision Support Centres and Clubs. These devices remove the risk of tripping over cables and can be connected to

earphones so even people without a hearing aid can benefit if they have difficulty hearing what is going on. We would like to thank the WCC Councillors Grant Fund, The W G Edwards Charity and the Act Foundation for their grants.

- The IT Service has also received £5,800 in donations from the GJW Turner, WO Street, WED and Lillie C Johnson Charitable Trusts.

I would like to thank each and every one of these organisations that have awarded grants, enabling us to

provide you with the support that you need.

Of course it is not only trusts and foundations who support our activities. We are extremely grateful to those members who make regular donations towards our services and for those who leave a legacy gift in their will. It is only through the generosity of all our supporters that we are able to provide such a wide range of services.

Thank you

## Warwickshire Vision Support **Invitation to a Regional Meeting**

On: Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2016

11:00 am (coffee will be served from 10.30 am)

At: St Mary's Church, Church Street, Atherstone CV9 1HH

This will be an informal meeting offering the opportunity to:

- Ask questions, but if detailed answers are needed please submit in advance in writing
- Socialise and meet some of the Directors/Trustees and Staff of Warwickshire Vision Support.

The meeting will finish by 12.30 p.m.

All Members are welcome, but unless you live in North Warwickshire you will not receive an agenda in advance of this meeting. However, copies will be available on request from the Office and at the meeting.

# Volunteers and Volunteering

## *What it's like to be a Volunteer*

**Myra Lewis**

Coventry Vision Support Centre

Well ... this is my first volunteer role and if I'd known it was this good I'd have done it years ago. Better late than never, hey! It's become part of my life and I miss it, if, for any reason I can't attend. It's good knowing that each Friday I can become part of a VERY VALUABLE service for the visually impaired, as it's what I've always believed to be the hardest sense to live without, with the trust one has to have in others.

The canine escorts are amazing too, even they get a drink at the Centre, along with our visitors who I find to be kind and friendly. Often we have gifts brought to us by visitors who've just returned from a holiday in warmer climes or bear edible goodies, especially on a birthday, when we share some cake.

It all enhances my theory of 'take nothing for granted'; also reminds me how lucky I am, and grateful if I'm feeling low, although it's hard to feel low in WVS. If I go in to work on a 'low' I always leave on a 'high' and it rubs off on others I meet.

Each Friday morning is different and each of our visitors brings something different to our get-togethers. Our chats over coffee are varied, interesting and funny and Stan's jokes never cease to make

us laugh. We talk about all sorts, from Armadillos to Zithers. We've all become friends and help each other out in many different ways.

Our Xmas parties are good too, with one of our visitors playing music on his electric organ. We also had line dancing where all have fun looking silly trying to master the steps. Being a Volunteer for an important cause beats any paid work I might not enjoy or where I might not be appreciated. I feel as if I've been a volunteer at WVS for ever. (WAB, as it was when the Drop in Centre first set up 4 years ago.)

Not a bad 4 years, considering I wasn't looking for work, the work found me. Originally, I went into the Centre looking for a Yoga class advertised at the same venue. Who needs Yoga when I've got a job that makes me feel good?

## *Awarded by the Mayor*

The Victorian Town Hall was the venue for the Annual Meeting of the Town Council of Royal Leamington Spa. Councillors had been summoned to the Assembly Room. Among the people attending were the Mayors and their Consorts from a number of the local Councils, all wearing their chains of office (known colloquially as the chain gang). Everyone stood up when the Mayor was announced and then led in to take her seat centre-stage.

Judy Murdoch



The meeting was open to the public and its main business was the Mayor's Announcements, including the disbursement of the Mayor's Charity Fund for 2015/16 and the Mayor's Annual Awards also the election of the Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor for 2016/17.

The outgoing Mayor made six Awards to people who had contributed in a voluntary capacity to the local community. One of the recipients was a WVS Volunteer.

Judy Murdoch has Volunteered for Warwickshire Vision Support, formerly known as Warwickshire Association for the Blind, for well over 20 years.

She originally set up a VI Club in Henley in Arden which met at Dell Court. This group is still running today as a Lunch club.

For many years she organised a club in Warwick, which later merged with the Good Companions Club in Leamington Spa, which still meets twice a month at Chandos Court.

Judy has been the Chairperson for Warwickshire Vision Support and helped many members in the Leamington area. She is currently Chair of the South Warwickshire Committee which covers all the clubs in the south of Warwickshire.

Judy also currently volunteers for the Leamington Home Visitor Service, which she has done for many years. The Home Visiting Service is a lifeline to Visually Impaired People, helping with their correspondence, reading to them and easing their isolation by being a friendly face and someone they look forward to meeting.

From the front door of the Town Hall a hallway leads to a wide, sweeping staircase, and at the end of the corridor to the left is the Assembly Room. This high-ceilinged room has a stage at one end, and to one side of this is Warwickshire's coat of arms - the bear and ragged staff. Also displayed is Leamington's own coat of arms.

It was in this Assembly Room that the inaugural meeting of Warwickshire Association for the Blind was held and it was also in this room where a re-enactment of that meeting was presented as part of our Centenary Celebrations in 2011.



Ian Foulds, registered blind, who is a Member of WVS, and is a Town Councillor of Royal Leamington Spa, said

'I was delighted that the Town Council decided to honour Judy in this way for all her wonderful voluntary service to the blind people of Leamington Spa over many years.

Judy continues to give me excellent personal administrative support on her many visits to me under the Reader/Visitor Scheme.'

Judy Murdoch, who received a certificate and engraved glass, said that she was touched and delighted to receive the award.

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## Health and Wellbeing

### *New NHS*

### *Information Standard*

Does your General Practitioner know your preferred format for information?

If your GP Practice already knows what your preferred format is - large print, braille or audio - this information should have been recorded on your record. (Healthcare providers should have identified and recorded this information by 1<sup>st</sup> April.)

On 31st July 2016 the new NHS Accessible Information Standard (SCCI 1605) comes into force.

Although the Equality Act 2010 already requires service providers to provide information in accessible formats, this new Standard reinforces it. This new NHS Standard means that everyone should receive their health information in a format they can read for themselves.

If your GP Practice Manager does not already know your required

accessible format they should be informed in writing - by letter or e-mail.

If you need help with informing your GP Practice there is a template letter that can be obtained from the office, at our Vision Support Centres or Clubs. Alternatively, you can download a copy of a GP notification template at [www.rnib.org.uk/needittoreadit](http://www.rnib.org.uk/needittoreadit)

For more information or a hardcopy of a GP notification template phone the RNIB's Helpline on **0303 123 9999**

P.S. This magazine is printed in 16 point font.

### *Depression in Visual Impairment: Major New Study* Christine Ramble, Warwick

The prevalence of depression in people with sight loss is among the highest for any health condition or disability, yet there is virtually no provision for depression screening, according to a recent

report commissioned by the charity Guide Dogs.

The 3-year study by the Cardiff University's School of Optometry and Vision Sciences found that nearly half of people who use low vision clinics suffer from depression but are not given the help they need. The Depression in Visual Impairment Trial found that although 43 per cent of people who lose their sight go on to battle depression, NHS low vision services focus only on physical needs with psychological screening or therapy not yet an integral part of the rehabilitation. The study, one of the biggest in the world, screened over 1,000 people at rehabilitation centres in South Wales and London, using a routine questionnaire for depression. It also found that of those who screened positive for depression, nearly three quarters were not receiving treatment for the condition.

Head of the Trial, Dr Margrain, described the results as 'extremely alarming', and said that despite recommendations from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) that high-risk groups should be routinely screened. Among the 200 hospitals across the UK that run low vision services, only two provided psychological screening and support.

Both Dr Margrain and Jenny Cook, Guide Dogs' Head of Research and Strategy, stressed that the report made it clear that it was essential

for early screening and effective treatment to be integrated into rehabilitation services as soon as possible. People could then be referred to their GP for appropriate treatment, if necessary, or otherwise supported and encouraged to regain their confidence and independence. It was important to treat people as a whole, not just as a pair of eyes, and to find out how they were feeling about their sight loss.

Jenny Cook added: 'For the first time we have data confirming that people with a visual impairment suffer some of the highest rates of depression. Adjusting to sight loss can be extremely challenging. Many people struggle with feelings of isolation, find activities they used to enjoy more difficult and feel reliant on family and friends. Depression is a debilitating illness that provides an extra barrier to seeking the right help and support, but it can be treated.'

### **Sight Loss Specific Emotional Help and Support**

So apart from supportive family and friends, what professional and emotional help is available to address the psychological problems of sight loss? Diagnosis and treatment are given at hospital eye clinics, and most in Coventry and Warwickshire are fortunate enough to have a Vision Support Desk. The majority of these Desks are run part-time by a member of our Staff. The help offered can be invaluable in those first few dark

hours after diagnosis, a sympathetic listener who is also able to provide advice and guidance on practical steps and rehabilitation.

But the Vision Support Desk does not provide on-going emotional support and counselling, nor is such a service provided by the low vision centre to which the patient may be referred for practical aids such as magnifiers or special equipment. So the individual may feel very alone and isolated in the difficult and challenging weeks and months following as they, and often their families, struggle to deal with changes to daily life and the prospect of a bleak future. Eventually they might get so depressed that they feel unable to cope, and it might be advisable then to consult a GP for appropriate medical treatment or counselling.

There are also several organisations which provide sight loss specific emotional support. The most notable are:

### **RNIB Emotional Support Service**

Offers confidential telephone support and counselling help. This may be on a one to one basis; the first appointment offers an opportunity to talk about your personal situation and to explore what further support you might find helpful. If you decide to go on, mutually convenient appointments will be arranged, and always with the same counsellor, for up to eight sessions.

RNIB also offers group counselling session telephone support groups, called 'Seeing it through – Exploring thoughts and feelings about sight loss'. You will be able to share thoughts, feelings and experiences with others in similar circumstances. There are usually eight hourly meetings with five other people, facilitated by an RNIB Counsellor. For more information on RNIB Emotional Support and Counselling Service telephone **0303 123 9999** or visit [www.rnib.org.uk/emotionalsupport](http://www.rnib.org.uk/emotionalsupport)

### **Listening Eye**

Available between 6 and 10 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings on **0800 783 1979**.

### **Sightline**

Every evening including weekends between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. on **0800 587 2252**.

### **Thomas Pocklington Trust**

Also offers support to enable people to lead independent lives and a tele-befriending service which can be useful for ongoing support after counselling has ended. [www.pocklington-trust.org.uk](http://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk)

### **Sight Loss Programmes**

These can help people deal with the practical and emotional challenges of sight loss and involve a range of interactive workshops and discussions run by a professional facilitator. For further information see [www.rnib.org.uk/services-we](http://www.rnib.org.uk/services-we)

offer-advice-and-support-services/  
sight-loss-support-programmes

All the above services are free but it is advisable to check whether there is a charge for workshops.

## ***Age-related Macular Degeneration***

### **What is it and who can help?**

**Jane Davies**, Macular Society,  
Leamington Spa

I was very shocked when in 2005 I was suddenly unable to see my husband's face with my left eye and was diagnosed with wet Macular Degeneration. I was fortunate that the hospital gave me a leaflet about the Macular Society and I got information and reassurance from their helpline.

The macula is a small part of the retina at the back of the eye; it is responsible for our central vision, that is the fine detail of what we see - allowing us to read, sew, watch television, etc. When Macular Degeneration appears in later life it is called Age related Macular Degeneration or AMD; it is the most common cause of sight loss in people over 60. There are two forms of AMD – dry and wet.

Dry AMD is a gradual deterioration of the macula as retinal cells die off and are not renewed; progression may be very slow and take many years.

Wet AMD is caused by abnormal blood vessels growing in the macula,

they leak - which leads to scarring and can result in rapid loss of central vision. This can now be treated by injection if caught quickly.

People with dry Macular Degeneration should be aware that dry AMD can develop into wet, so it is important to notice if you experience a sudden change in your vision to contact your optometrist or hospital eye specialist urgently.

People with MD can help themselves by having regular eye tests, protecting their eyes with a wide brimmed hat and good sunglasses, eating a good diet containing green vegetables and fruit, exercising and not smoking.

Being diagnosed with MD can be distressing and worrying but with information and support people learn to cope well. You will probably be already getting help from your local team at Warwickshire Vision Support.

The Macular Society is a charity that also supports anyone affected by central vision loss. The helpline can put you in touch with a wide range of services - all are free and information is in large print, audio and on line. Services include counselling, treatment buddies, information leaflets, a telephone befriending service and local support groups.

Support groups meet regularly, providing a varied programme; people who attend find the

meetings helpful. Nearest groups are Leamington Spa, Coventry, Solihull also South Birmingham and Daventry.

The Macular Society also runs awareness campaigns and raises funds for research, including the stem cell project.

At present the Macular Society is offering a 6-month free trial membership. As a member you will receive the quarterly magazine Sideview and annual research report, Digest.



Contact the Macular Society:  
helpline – 0300 3030 111  
Website – [www.macularsociety.org](http://www.macularsociety.org)

### ***Stem Cell Therapy***

At the University of California, San Diego, scientists have been working on regenerative medicine. They snipped away the lens of the eye, leaving enough of the patient's own stem cells behind to grow it back again instead of inserting an artificial one.

Trials on rabbits and macaques were successful, so they operated on 12 human infants who had been born with congenital cataracts. They were able to completely regenerate the children's lenses in both eyes with no complications. The patients also had significantly better eyesight after

the operation than they would have done after normal cataract surgery.

This team of scientists is also working on ways to use a similar technique on age related cataracts.

At Osaka University in Japan stem cell work has been taking place to make tissue from other parts of the eye, including the retina and the cornea.

### ***Dry Eye***

**Sheila Venville, Warwick**

My bladder woke me  
At five zero one;  
I wondered how long  
I could just hold on.

The figures in red,  
Sited by my head,  
Mocked my reluctance,  
Dared me take a chance.

The warmth and the weight,  
My winter duvet,  
Fourteen point five tog,  
I slept like a log.

I looked the next time  
At quarter to nine.  
At success I smiled,  
At moisture I sighed.

The bed wasn't wet,  
A patch by my head  
Implied I had cried -  
Misnomered 'dry eye'.



## Features

### *Queen's Birthday Celebrations*



2016 marks the 90th birthday of Queen Elizabeth II, and across the country people have been celebrating with festivities and street parties.

This momentous occasion was also marked by members of Warwickshire Vision Support, with two clubs in the north of the county holding events to pay tribute to Britain's longest-reigning monarch.

In April, members of the Coleshill Club organised a meal at the Grimscote Manor Hotel, which was well-attended; while in May the Atherstone Club held an afternoon of celebration at St Mary's Church Hall, the venue for their fortnightly meetings.

At the Atherstone event, the hall was festooned with balloons and union flags, and guests were treated to a buffet lunch prepared by caterers from local cafe Tasty Bites. Entertainment was provided by professional vocalist Phil-Ski, who performed a selection of popular songs from the past seven decades while dressed in full military uniform.

Members drank a toast to the Queen, and gave a rousing rendition of the national anthem, while a photographer from the local newspaper, the Herald, was on hand to capture all the good cheer in glorious Technicolor.

### ***ESA and the RNIB***

#### ***Westminster Lobby***

**Paul Bowler, Coleshill**

The Welfare Reform and Work Act, which received Royal Assent in March, includes changes to Employment and Support Allowance that will see the benefit become less generous for new claimants after next April.

People eligible for ESA are placed into one of two categories, the support group (where there is no expectation for them to work), or the work related activity group (intended for those who may be able to work in the future, but are not yet ready). From April 2017 the amount paid



**John Davis with Paul Bowler talking to Craig Tracey MP (taken last year)**

to new claimants in the work group is being reduced from £102.15 to £73.10 a week, although existing claimants and those in the support group are not affected.

While the legislation was making its way through Parliament, the RNIB asked for members concerned about the potential effects the changes could have, and living in a constituency that had chosen a Conservative MP at the last election, to take part in a pan-disability lobby at Westminster, in order to highlight the issue.

As someone who felt the changes were a step in the wrong direction, on 13th January I travelled to Westminster to meet with my local MP, Craig Tracey, who represents North Warwickshire. The RNIB paid for my travel costs, and arranged

transport from the Midlands, as well as a sighted guide through London itself. After journeying to Euston by rail I was met by Costa Asprou, an RNIB campaigns assistant, and we travelled by cab to Portcullis House.

It was the first time I had visited Parliament to meet an MP, so I was a little unsure what to expect. I had in mind that our meeting would be a bit like the kind of setup on the TV series *Dragon's Den*, with Mr Tracey seated behind a large desk and flanked by his assistants. But the reality turned out to be much more informal.

After passing through the airport-style security, I was greeted by Craig's assistant, David Lydiat, who led me into a brightly lit cafe where Craig was waiting to meet me. Hands were shaken, and we had a chat over coffee.

I wanted to highlight the difficulties people with sight loss face when seeking employment, and to draw attention to the difficulties I felt the changes could present, chiefly that reducing the amount paid to those in the work group could push many into poverty and debt. I had about 15 minutes to make my case, and think I got over my main points.

Craig offered to write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on my behalf in order to voice my concerns, and to forward on his reply, both in print and in Braille. I received a response in both formats a few weeks later, from Priti Patel, the Minister for Employment.

In her letter, Ms Patel sets out the various measures she believes will offset the changes, among them a £100 million annual investment to provide practical support to people with disabilities who are looking for work, and an expansion of the Access to Work programme. The letter also suggests that Personal Independence Payment (PIP) may soften the financial impact. Of course, only time will tell exactly what effect the changes to ESA will have.

At the time of the lobby the legislation was in the process of being considered by the House of Lords, with the prospect that an amendment could be introduced to remove the ESA reduction from the Bill. Although this did subsequently

happen, it was overturned again when the Bill came back to the House of Commons for its final reading at the beginning of March.

Even though the lobby did not achieve its intended objective, for me taking part in it proved to be a great experience. It was a chance to meet my MP and see him at work, and provided me with a small glimpse into the world of politics. Given the opportunity, it is definitely something I would do again.

## ***Employment and Support Allowance***

If you claim for ESA, have you been correctly assessed? There is a new ruling resulting from a recent legal case.

New rules mean that if you can't read either Braille or 16 point print you should be placed in the 'support group'. People in the support group are paid at a higher rate and don't have to adhere to strict work-related conditions in order to continue receiving the benefit.

If you need to find out more about the ESA there is more information on [rnib.org.uk](http://rnib.org.uk) in the ESA section or you can call the RNIB Helpline on **0303 123 9999**



## ***A Day in the life of a Smart Phone – Part 2***

In the last edition we looked at how a smart phone could help us with daily tasks such as planning my day, making lists as well as practical things like checking the weather, and selecting colours.

In this article we are going to look at how a smart phone can help us keep in contact with family and friends.

Of course it is stating the obvious to say that a smart phone can make a phone call – but it is the way that you can make a call that makes the difference. I always found it difficult to scroll through lots of different numbers, often on a very small screen with poor contrast, to find the contact I wanted to call. With a smart phone, I can just press a button and say call 'Bob' and the phone does all the hard work.

Similarly, text messages were something that I avoided - they were too difficult to type and again I would be faced with scrolling through a list of contacts before I found the right one. Now I just dictate text messages without having to type a single letter and the phone will read back any texts that I receive. It is so much easier.

But, it is in the realm of email and social media that the smart phone really makes a huge difference. Like many people I used to get all my correspondence by post and that

was great. But as I lost my vision, I found physically reading letters more and more difficult. I am now in the process of moving as much of my correspondence over to email as possible. When an email arrives, it comes straight to my phone or tablet; it is then read out by the phone and I can dictate a reply again without having to type a single word. I was a little scared of email to start with but now I find it so liberating. I feel in control of things once more and most importantly, I have regained my privacy - I can keep in contact with friends, book appointments or make enquiries without needing someone else to assist.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of having a smart phone or tablet is using social media. I have to confess that I thought social media was something for the kids and I had no interest in it at all. But now I use Facebook to keep in contact with my grandchildren and we even have our own little social network of local



visually impaired people. We share what we are doing, make plans to go out and generally provide support to each other. It makes me feel connected, which is great during the winter months when I hardly ever get a chance to get out of the house.

Surprisingly, I even use video calling services like Skype and Facetime. You might wonder why a visually impaired person would use a video service but it really is useful. If I cannot read the label on a can, I can just hold it up in front of the phone and my daughter will read the label for me. It also helps with family calls – I can use what vision I have to see how much the grand children have grown, and my daughter can be reassured that I am fit and healthy. It's not perfect but when we all live such great distances away from each other, it really does make a difference.

In this second article, we have covered just a few more of the tools available on any smart phone or tablet that can improve your quality of life. In future editions we will cover different areas. Of course, not all Apps work perfectly, and some are more appropriate than others, but we believe that with the right phone or tablet and the right training, technology really can make a difference to the way you live your life.

The digital world is here. It might be a challenge to bridge the digital divide but the benefits are plentiful.

If you want more information about the IT Training Programme please call us on **01926 411331** or visit your local Vision Support Centre.

## ***Wendy's Bee Course***

**Wendy Carter** (and **Juliet**),  
Leamington Spa

My daughter Juliet and I attended a weekly introduction to beekeeping at Stoneleigh Park. It was fascinating; a new culture to learn, with friendly, informed beekeepers.

Bees are essential to mankind's survival, so understanding and practising their care is a practical and social duty. We hope next year to keep a hive or hives of our own. Meanwhile Juliet's allotment space is being used to good advantage by some 'lodger' bees. We can encourage bee friendly plants there and also in our own garden.

We learned about the different types of hive, bee behaviour and temperament, the equipment needed, and how to moderate colony behaviour to encourage honey production. There are many modern risks facing bees, including commonplace diseases and inadequate protection from government sanctioned, deadly pesticides.

We are all encouraged and need to plant blossom bearing plants and shrubs and trees providing for bees' needs from early spring to autumn. Early flowering plants



are particularly important as bees need more support in the colder months. Bees particularly like purple. Hives are at their busiest and have larger colonies in the summer months, which means they need lots of food. The British Bee Keepers Association is conveniently located here in Warwickshire at Stoneleigh Park [www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk) or **02476 696679** As well as providing training and support, they produce a very detailed pamphlet 'Planting for honey bees', a small selection from which are - honeysuckle (especially winter flowering) and snowdrops, flowering from January to April; lilacs flower from May to June, buddleia from June to September and salvia from June to November. And of course let's not forget the symbiotic relationship of all fruit trees and bushes with bees.

### ***Garden Advice***

To deter cats spray dry teabags with Deep Heat then bury them ½" under the soil about 12" apart.

To deter ants use Johnson's baby powder.

Do you put food out for birds that is taken by squirrels? If you want to deter them, grate cheap soap (perhaps from the £1 shop) by the birds' food.

Carrot seeds should be planted at spade depth. The soil should be fine with all stones removed and should

be riddled with sand. Use the spade to open up a V shape.

### ***The Changing Face of Food***

I took the top off the pot  
To add some yoghurt to my oats  
And I couldn't find that top anywhere.  
I felt across the counter,  
I scabbled further on the floor,  
Cursed as I bumped into an open door.  
I gave up and added fruit  
To the oats which were cooling fast  
And sat down to my usual repast.

Dinner time found me chopping  
My veggies into bite size chunks  
Before their steaming in the microwave.  
I cooked in oil the fish mix  
Though it was meant to make a pie  
And served the lot in a large pasta dish.  
This way, I use fork and spoon  
To keep control of all my food;  
I feel the pattern outside of the bowl.

I wiped down the chopping board,  
Carefully washed my little hoard  
Of really useful plastic containers.  
I stacked on the draining rack,  
Counting out loud as I did lids,  
Working as on automatic pilot:  
There's a smaller lid in there,  
Still floating in the soap bubbles,  
The troublesome top of that yoghurt pot!

**Sheila Venville**, Warwick

### **Editor**

Sheila is a member of Spa Writers.

## ***An Afternoon with Bob Brolly***

**Paul Bowler, Coleshill**

On 14<sup>th</sup> April members of Warwickshire Vision Support's Atherstone Club enjoyed an afternoon at Coventry's Belgrade Theatre, in the company of veteran broadcaster Bob Brolly.

Bob, who has presented shows on BBC Coventry and Warwickshire for many years, was appearing at the Belgrade with his popular show, Bob Brolly and Friends: A Taste of Ireland, which features him performing a mix of traditional Irish folk ballads and Country and Western songs.

Proceedings kicked off at 1.30 pm, as Bob and his band welcomed the audience. After a couple of opening numbers he introduced Andante, an instrumental duo from the West Midlands, who demonstrated their musical expertise on instruments as diverse as the recorder, the banjo and even a bodhran. One of the highlights of the performance was their interpretation of a banjo duel featuring banjo and recorder.

Returning to the stage following the interval, Bob presented an hour of music and chat, which included some of the songs for which he is well known, as well as stories and anecdotes from his childhood growing up in Derry and his years in broadcasting.

Audience members were encouraged to join in with the songs they

knew, and many did so with great enthusiasm. A number of Bob's regular listeners were in attendance, some of whom had travelled from across Warwickshire and the West Midlands to be there, and he made a point of speaking to as many of them as possible during the show. There were several choruses of Happy Birthday.

Our seats had an excellent view of the stage, and it was a very enjoyable afternoon. Huge thanks must go to Lynn Rock for organising the outing, as well as to John, our coach driver, who drove everybody from Atherstone. Hopefully there will be many more trips like this in the future.

### **Letters to the Editor**

**Meryl Beeks, Warwick**

Congratulations on your Spring edition of Warwickshire Vision. It was bumper full of interesting material. I enjoyed reading all the articles.

**Bob and Meryl Beck, Leamington**

We recently stayed at at a Bed and Breakfast that was very welcoming for guide dogs. We would like to pass on the details to readers:

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## Leisure

### *Royal Shakespeare Company*

During the second half of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebratory year of Shakespeare the RSC will be performing two of his greatest plays at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

**King Lear** has ruled for many years. As age begins to overtake him he decides to divide his kingdom amongst his children, living out his days without the burden of power. A proud man, he allows vanity to cloud his judgement, believing that he can relinquish the crown, but enjoy the same authority and respect he has always known.

Misjudging his children's loyalty, he soon finds himself stripped of all the trappings of state, wealth and power he had taken for granted. Alone in the wilderness he is left to confront the mistakes of a life that brought him to this point.

Antony Sher plays King Lear in Audio Described performances on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September and Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> October, both at 1.15 p.m.

AD provides an audio description of each scene and the action as it unfolds. In addition there is a free touch tour 2¼ hours before each AD performance.

**The Tempest** is the magical storm created by Prospero. His enemies have left him in isolation on an island, robbed of his position, power and wealth. But he is no



ordinary man and this is no ordinary island. Prospero is a magician, able to control the very elements and bend nature to his will. When a sail appears on the horizon, he reaches out across the ocean to the ship that carries the men who wronged him. Creating a vast magical storm he wrecks the ship and washes his enemies up on the shore. When they wake they find themselves lost on a fantastical island where nothing is as it seems.

There will be AD performances on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> December and Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2017, both at 1.15 p.m.

RSC performances will also take place at the Swan Theatre in Stratford.

**The Two Nobel Kinsmen**, attributed to John Fletcher and William Shakespeare, is based on Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*. Two best friends, knights at arms, are captured in battle and imprisoned. From their window they see a beautiful woman and both fall instantly in love with her, turning from intimate friendship to jealous rivalry in the space of a minute.

One is released and goes AWOL in the woods of Athens, searching for a way to be near his beloved. When the

jailer's daughter frees the other, and follows him into the forest herself, the stage is set for absurd adventures and painful confusions in this study of the intoxication and strangeness of love.

AD performances of this tragicomedy will take place on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> November and Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2017 at 1.30 p.m.

**The Rover** by Aphra Behn tells the story of three wandering cavaliers, exiled from Cromwell's England, who meet up in a Spanish colony as carnival begins. Meanwhile three wealthy sisters escape their overbearing brother and disappear into the city in search of love.

As night falls and the wine flows, chaos ensues. Passions run high as lovers meet, men are conned and swords drawn. This anarchic Restoration comedy is rich with seduction, intrigue and danger in the topsy-turvy world of the carnival.

Saturdays 22<sup>nd</sup> October and 19<sup>th</sup> November at 1.30 p.m. are the dates of the AD performances.

**The Seven Acts of Mercy** by Anders Lustgarten is about Caravaggio's masterpiece – his first painting since he killed a man and fled Rome. Inside an unfinished church in Naples 1606 he works on the painting fuelled by anger, self-loathing and his driving need to create a work that speaks of compassion in a violent world.

Bootle, the present day. A retired dock worker teaches his grandson, as around them a community is disintegrating under the pressure of years of economic and political degradation. With all he has left - a book of great works of art - he tries to open the boy's eyes to the tragedy and beauty of the life he faces. And the boy reciprocates in the only way he knows.

Playing out across a gap of 400 years, this visceral new play confronts the dangerous necessity of compassion, in a world where it is in short supply.

AD performances will take place on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> January at 1.30 p.m. and Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2017 at 7.30 p.m.

There are seven allocated parking bays for blue-badge users on Waterside, directly outside the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and ten further bays on Chapel Lane, the road opposite the Swan Theatre. They are free of charge and do not have a time limit.

There are four seats available at every performance in the front row of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and Swan Theatre stalls for VIPs. Please ask Box Office staff about the availability of these seats when booking your ticket.

Assistance dogs can be taken into the auditorium, or left with a member of staff in the foyer. If you wish to bring your assistance dog with you please



tell Box Office staff when booking your seat.

Touch tours are free and can be booked at the same time. They offer the opportunity to get close to the set, costumes and props used in the play. During a tour backstage, the audio describers will guide you through important props and character costumes used in the production.

Tickets for productions in Stratford-upon-Avon for disabled people are £16. If you require the services of a companion their ticket will also be £16. To book please call **01789 403436** or on-line using the access booking form at [www.rsc.org.uk](http://www.rsc.org.uk).

## ***More Audio Description Services***



VocalEyes is a nationwide Audio Description service for people with a visual impairment, providing access to the best in the arts.

VocalEyes has trained staff in many museums, galleries and heritage sites to deliver AD described tours. They have also developed recorded description for audio guides. For theatre shows an introductory CD will be sent out a few days in advance

of the performance. It provides details of the sets, costumes, and characters in the production, as well as information on the theatre's accessibility and layout. Fifteen minutes before the performance is due to start, the describers will repeat the production information, updating you on any changes.

**Sunny Afternoon**, the musical, tells the story of the Kinks and is at the New Alexandra Theatre in Birmingham on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September at 2.30 p.m. with a touch tour due to take place at 1 p.m.

Concessions are available. When booking, say that you are booking for a VocalEyes described performance. Telephone **0121 230 9077**

**Open House Weekend** will be on 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> September. For more information on this and on Museums Galleries and Heritage Sites where AD is provided by VocalEyes telephone **020 7375 1043** or e-mail [enquiries@vocaleyeyes.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@vocaleyeyes.co.uk)

## **Sight Village 2016**

Experience the latest products and equipment available for Visually Impaired People at New Bingley Hall, Hockley, Birmingham B18 5BE. This free annual exhibition will be held on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> July.

## **New Money**

New £5 banknotes featuring Winston Churchill will be introduced in September. They may feel different from the old notes, as they will be polymer. Thirty other countries already use polymer banknotes. Be warned that there is a tendency for brand new polymer notes to stick together. The launch of other denominations will follow.

## **Acknowledgements**

Grateful thanks are expressed to Kenilworth Talking News for producing the digital audio version of Warwickshire Vision and to Phil Arkell for the layout of the printed version.

We acknowledge the use of information from Connect and The Times. Views expressed in Warwickshire Vision are not necessarily those of the management of Warwickshire Vision Support.

Warwickshire Vision is distributed FREE to all members of  
Warwickshire Vision Support

This publication is also available in digital audio, Braille and by email

For more information, please contact us

 **01926 411331**

Email: [enquiries@warwickshire.vision](mailto:enquiries@warwickshire.vision)

Website: [www.warwickshire.vision](http://www.warwickshire.vision)

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