

Warwickshire Vision

Summer 2020



- WVS receives The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service
- Volunteer Awards 2020
- New services for the 'new normal'

Supporting people living with sight loss since 1911



Business as (un)usual

We're still here, still open and still supporting you



Although the world may have changed a lot in the past few months, eye conditions and those affected by them haven't. We've adapted our communications and how we work to ensure that nobody has to go without the high levels of training and technical support they are used to. You can still reach any of our teams by telephone on the normal number, although our sales team can't come to you - you can still organise a one-on-one session to explore the solution that is of interest to you via a video call.

Keeping you entertained and informed during the lockdown

Every Wednesday at 2 pm the charismatic Stuart Lawler hosts a free webinar on Zoom video calling service. Anyone with access to the internet can tune in to watch Stuart and the team discuss and demonstrate everything from the latest in braille technology to the best in magnification - answering questions along the way. The world might have gone a bit upside down but we are still here to keep you the right side up!

To stay up to date with what's coming up on our next webinars, podcasts, or anything else - you can sign up to the newsletter here: <https://mailchi.mp/sightandsound/signup>

Stay-at-home discount on the best in portable magnification

Sight and Sound Technology are celebrating over 40 years of supporting independence and inclusion for people who are blind or partially sighted.

To help us celebrate, we have 4 great offers on our popular RUBY® range of handheld video magnifiers.



- RUBY at **£199.00**
- RUBY HD at **£275.00**
- RUBY XL HD at **£399.00**
- RUBY 7 HD at **£499.00**

See all of our current offers by visiting www.sightandsound.co.uk/offers.html

Contents

Editorial 4

News Round-Up 5

Features 10

Focus on Health 22

Spotlight on Equipment 24

Advice and Guidance 26

Volunteer Focus 32

Creative Writing 34

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Editorial

by Phil Arkell - CEO

When I first thought about the Editorial for this magazine, everything I considered writing about seemed challenging, uncertain or somewhat depressing. We have all faced so much. Some have lost loved ones and many feel lonely and isolated.

Then I thought about what our volunteers and staff team have achieved in just 3 months and I was filled with pride.

I am proud that:

- Within just 10 days, we went from an office-based organisation to one functioning almost seamlessly from homes across the county
- The staff team has worked tirelessly from dining tables, kitchens and bedrooms to support so many people
- Our volunteers embraced the challenge, making welfare calls to over 3,000 people to make sure they had practical and emotional support
- In a little over 3 weeks, we had a brand new telephone befriending service offering social support to 280 people



- That we have celebrated our 2nd Annual Volunteer Awards. Thank you to both those who received an award and those who nominated them

To crown these achievements, receiving The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service recognises the dedication and commitment of our wonderful volunteers.

The decision that we should receive this honour may have been made before the Covid-19 crisis hit, but recent months have certainly demonstrated our volunteers' calibre.

We should all be proud!

Thank you.

News Round-Up



We are extremely proud to announce that the volunteers of Warwickshire Vision Support have been awarded The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in recognition of the high quality service delivered to our service users.

This award is the charity equivalent of an MBE and is a reflection of the wonderful commitment and dedication of our volunteers. In fact, our volunteers are one of only two successful nominations in Warwickshire this year.

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service was created in 2002 to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee. It is a true celebration of volunteering and something that each and every one of us can be proud of.

Under normal circumstances, a reception would be held for the recipients with a presentation from Mr Timothy Cox, Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire. This may take place later this summer but with the ongoing pandemic restrictions, we will have to wait and see what may be possible closer to the date.

Two volunteers from Warwickshire Vision Support will also be given the opportunity to attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace in May 2021, along with other recipients of this year's Award.

Speaking upon hearing the good news, Liz Thiebe, our Chair said:

'We are thrilled with the recognition provided by this award. We would not have been able to respond to the Covid-19 challenges without the commitment, flexibility and willingness from our volunteers. This commitment can be seen across the entire spectrum of volunteer talent - from the volunteer board to the volunteers making the calls to our visually impaired people over the past 3 months. A big well done and thank you to all of our volunteers.'

New Approaches

by Phil Arkell

Who would have thought in January that just 2 months later, we would be forced to suspend our front facing services, close the office and develop a whole new way of working? And yet here we are, adjusting to a completely new situation.

Of course, getting to where we are today took an enormous amount of hard work and creative thinking from our staff team and the unflinching support of our volunteers.

With little notice, we were thrust into a challenging and scary world of empty shelves, restricted movement and prolonged isolation. Our fragile support networks were tested to their limits as friends and family were forced to isolate and we all became dependent upon the goodwill of strangers in a time of need.

Our first priority was to make sure that everyone was safe during the lockdown. Our staff and volunteers worked tirelessly to ensure that every person known to us had practical and emotional support to get them through the crisis.

This meant making more than 3,000 calls to establish each person's level of need. We linked hundreds of people to local shopping services, provided people with a social lifeline, and I believe, saved some lives.

With little indication that our clubs, home visiting and support centres would be able to restart safely anytime soon, we moved to the next stage - re-imagining, planning and launching new services for what may be a 'new normal'.

The new virtual support centres are simply a telephone chat room where we host small groups who want to connect with friends, seek advice and break the monotony of isolation. Run at the same time as your regular support centre, you simply dial in at your allocated time. Everyone is welcome – call 01926 411331 for details.

If this service proves popular, then we will explore with our Club Leaders whether this model could be replicated further.

For those who want more personalised support, the telephone befriending service is now supporting over 280 people with regular phone calls from over 120 volunteers. The service is flexible and user-friendly offering a chance to chat, share some merriment and make sure that all is well.

Of course, we are all looking forward to when we can return to 'normal' and restart our services. All I can say for now is that we will constantly monitor the situation and be guided by Public Health Warwickshire.

Sue Morris Retires

by Phil Arkell

After 17 years of service, Sue Morris has decided to hang up her magnifier and enjoy a well-deserved retirement. Sue joined us in 2003 as Volunteer Co-ordinator for the Warwickshire Talking Book Service which later became De Montfort Talking Books.

From 2009 Sue became an Information Officer and was instrumental in setting up our eye clinic advice desks and for over a decade has enabled people to understand and come to terms with their vision loss.

Additionally, Sue has been a constant presence at the Vision Support Centres, Clubs and Home Visiting service and will be known to volunteers and service users alike.

On behalf of the trustees, staff, volunteers and service users, I would like to wish Sue a long and happy retirement.



Looking Forward

Over the last few months, we have taken time to talk with our stakeholders to review how we operate, what services we deliver and what services we should consider developing in the coming years.

The Board of Trustees now has the task of distilling this information into a strategy for the Charity.

We look forward to sharing the new vision for WVS in the next edition of Warwickshire Vision and of course at our next AGM.

For those who gave up their time to share their thoughts, we are very grateful.

AGM Update

Last year, we held a highly successful AGM in Leamington Spa. It proved to be a great opportunity for our volunteers and service users to provide us with essential feedback on how we were performing and what activities we should consider developing.

Our next AGM is scheduled for Friday 23rd October. At the moment, the prospect of hosting a traditional AGM remains uncertain. We cannot place anyone at risk.

We will, of course, monitor the advice of the Government and make a final decision towards the end of the summer. However, we may need to host a virtual AGM over the Internet or delay the event until next year.

Voting members will still receive the Annual Report Summary and the postal ballots for the election of members to the Board of Trustees in early September.

Wendy's Challenge - Ben Nevis

Due to Covid-19 and lockdown restrictions, Wendy Pope was forced to reschedule her Ben Nevis challenge and will now be embracing the climb on Sunday 13th September. Ben Nevis is the highest mountain in the British Isles, standing at 1,345 metres. Wendy who attends our Nuneaton Vision Support Centre has decided to embrace the climb and will be accompanied by a guide.

Diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa when she was just 7 years old, today Wendy's eyesight is significantly impaired - she relies on gorgeous Lily her guide dog for support. Wendy plans to raise money for Warwickshire Vision Support.



You can sponsor Wendy online at:

localgiving.org/fundraising/wendy-beats-ben-nevis

Please show your support for Wendy by sponsoring her to complete this climb. If you do not have Internet access then please feel free to send your sponsorship money by cheque to Warwickshire Vision Support, 5 Charles Court, Budbrooke Road, Warwick CV34 5LZ.

Membership

Warwickshire Vision Support relies on its voting members to protect and shape the charity - to prepare it for the future and make sure that it meets the needs and expectations of people living with sight loss in Warwickshire.

As a voting member, you will elect the Board of Trustees, receive the Annual Report of the charity and can attend the Annual General Meeting.

As a voting member, your only financial obligation is that you commit to paying the sum of £1 in the unlikely event that the charity becomes bankrupt.

If you want to be heard, then why not request an application form from the office today. Simply call 01926 411331 and ask for a voting member form or download from our website at www.warwickshire.vision

Beware, E-Scooters are Coming

A recent decision to permit the trialling of rented electric scooters in Birmingham and Coventry has raised a great deal of concern across the local VI community.

Although designed to provide greener travel solutions, the nature of electric vehicles causes problems for people living with sight loss who struggle to hear an approaching vehicle. The fact that e-scooters are small and silent makes them particularly difficult to identify, whilst a proposed top speed of 15.5 mph increases the likelihood of a collision.

Currently, RNIB is asking that e-scooters have a restricted speed limit of 12.5 mph but the preference is for 4 mph; that they are designed

to make a recognisable sound; there are clear parking regulations to avoid trip risks; and, that there should be a full public consultation on the subject after the trial period.

E-scooters will not be allowed on pavements, but there remains a great deal of concern as to the extent that this can and will be enforced.



Wartime Service and Memories

Doreen Rimell Remembers

interviewed by Karina Gregory

Doreen was a member of the Women's Land Army since the beginning of the war. For the first 9 months she worked on the land before she learnt to drive a tractor. Doreen vividly remembers each air raid over the city of Birmingham where she lived and the devastation caused by the dropped bombs. The Land Girls, as they were known, were asked to use their clothing coupons to buy their uniforms which they were expected to return at the end

of the war - meaning they had no new clothing.

Doreen remembers the celebration that took place on VE day in the field at the back of the houses in the road where she lived. It was a day of great relief with a party atmosphere and celebration that the war was finally over. Doreen continues to feel that the contribution the Land Girls made to the war effort continues to be largely underestimated.



Memories of Rita Jeremiah

interviewed in 2019 by Louise Jelley

Rita shared her experiences of joining the war effort. She told me: 'I joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force WAAF in 1942 and served for 3 years until 1945. I worked in the Stores, fitting uniforms. I was one of

three ladies, all friends, who decided when we were 17 to join up. I went to Coventry for an interview and then started at RAF Church Lawford in Rugby and then RAF Snitterfield. I went to Morecambe for marching training and then to Bridlington, East Riding of Yorkshire for my specific stores training.'

Rita is very proud of a photo she carries of her late father in his military uniform standing alongside her in her WAAF uniform.

Rita served to the end of the war in 1945 and then left the military and started life as a civilian post-war, working in Joseph's Factory on the Birmingham Road in

Stratford-upon-Avon for some 21 years.



Rita and her father

Childhood Memories of the War

by Rosalie Visick

I was 12 years old when the war ended. During the war, I was living on the outskirts of Liverpool with my parents and so was not evacuated. My father was in the Police Force and spent the war years on duty in the Liverpool Docks area - a main target for the German bombers.

Luckily he survived the many air raids, but a lot of shops in Liverpool were bombed. Our visits to the city centre were few and far between, but each time we did go we saw more buildings had been flattened. I remember the bombed areas being covered with pink flowers which seemed to spring up wherever buildings had been demolished.

We children were told that if the sirens went off, to go straight to the nearest shelter - I remember running to the big brick-built shelter at the end of my road.

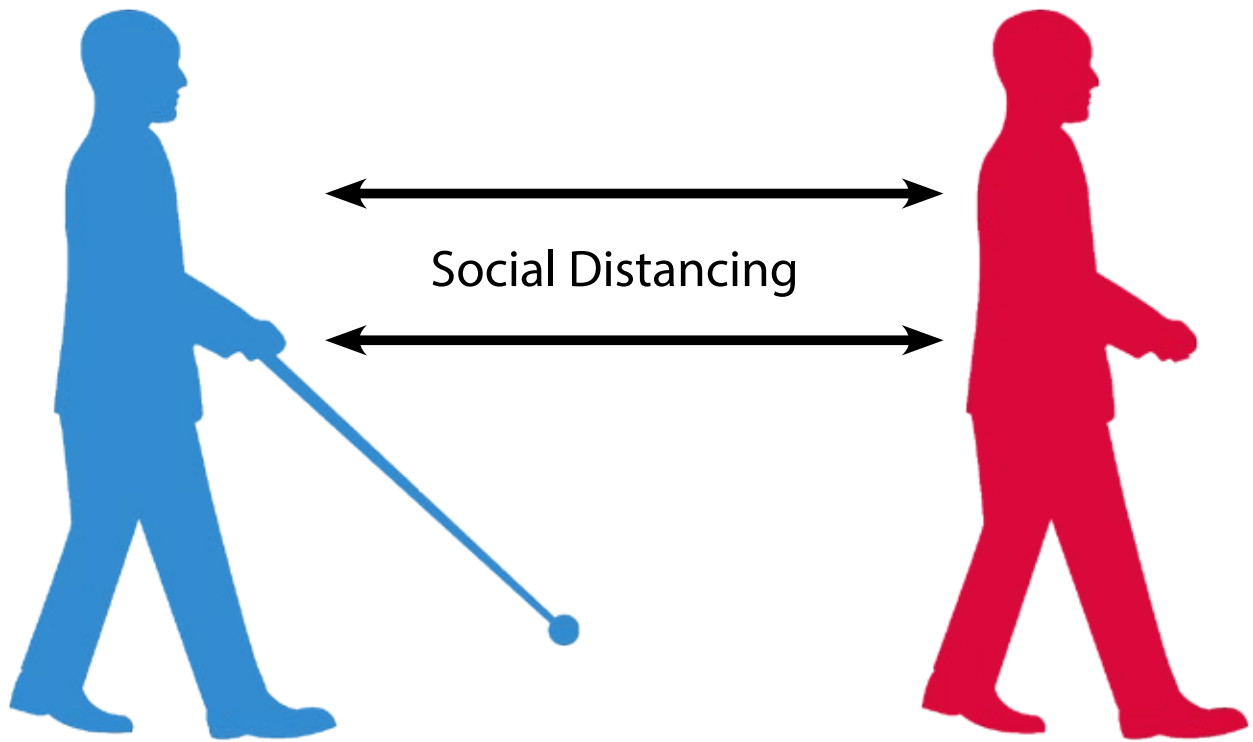
Dad, if not at work, was always on duty during air-raids. Sometimes

Mum and I would sleep downstairs in a corner of the sitting room, although I do remember sometimes we sheltered in the cupboard under the stairs.

If the bombing was heavy we used to go out into the shelter and, after the All Clear sounded, Mum always knocked the upstairs window of our elderly neighbours - Mr. and Mrs. Grimes - with the clothes prop to let them know we were alright. They were too old to use their shelter.

Living on the outskirts of Liverpool we didn't get many bombs dropping but I do remember one falling in the road nearby and the blast forcing our back door open. My Aunt and Uncle had a lucky escape. They lived in nearby Aintree and a bomb bounced off their roof into the alley behind their house but didn't go off.

Everyone rejoiced when the war ended and I can remember we had a street party which extended quite a way along the field at the back of our home.



Social Distancing - Don't Stand so Close to Me

by Andrew Baker

With the introduction of social distancing rules WVS has received a lot of calls from members about how best to conform and still remain independent.

Many of the tools used to keep us apart are visual cues such as markings on the floor, inaccessible signage and eye contact with other people.

Callers have expressed concerns about getting close to people, queuing at shops, linking arms and using public transport. Also questions about using a face mask and touching things.

Even with some vision, sticking to social distancing rules is incredibly difficult as many WVS members have discovered. Often, we need a helping hand to cross that busy road or find an item in the supermarket.

So, what can be done to stay safe and still get out and about?

Before setting off, check you have hand sanitiser with you, disinfectant wipes and, if taking the bus, using public transport or visiting the shops, a face mask or covering. Oh, and if shopping, have a list ready.

Let the general public know you have a visual impairment. It can be hard

to carry a cane, especially for the first time, but now is the time to snap open that folding white cane and have it on display. Most people know what a white cane is, and so will give you extra time, move out the way or talk to you and help. If you have 'lost' that symbol cane or it's seen better days, call the office and request a replacement.

Remember that symbol canes are not designed to put your weight on or for detecting obstacles on the ground such as kerbs and steps. Foldable reflective white symbol canes are lightweight - are used extended and held diagonally across the body. It is important that the symbol cane is always held with the tip facing towards the ground and **NOT** held pointing outwards as this presents a hazard to others.

Shopping

When queuing, you may think someone is too close. So just tell them you have a visual impairment and ask if you are the correct distance away from each other - the sound of their voice will help you judge how close you are. In shops with the new layout and/or one-way systems it can be a bit confusing. Just ask for assistance from the shop staff, who are wearing PPE and are ready to help.

Sighted Guiding

Taking someone's arm as a sighted guide needs a little thought. Some

guides may be cautious about linking arms or holding hands or might be unsure what to do. In the BBC In Touch programme broadcast on 19th May 2020, Professor Robert Dingwall, a sociologist with a public health speciality from Nottingham Trent University, said that people walking next to each other is the safest place to minimise the risk of infection from Coronavirus.

We suggest using sighted guide techniques. That is when the visually impaired person holds the guide's arm lightly above the elbow and allows the guide to walk one half-step ahead. This makes it easy to follow the guide's direction.

To begin, the guider should touch the arm of the person being guided with the elbow of the arm they plan to use. You can then take the arm above the elbow, remembering to hold your cane in your spare hand. Offer to wear a disposable glove if touching another person.

Don't forget, after your journey, wash your hands and disinfect your cane ready for your next trip.

The government's rules and advice change frequently, so stay alert and listen to the news for the latest information.

Any questions - contact the Rehab Team on 01926 411331.

Coronavirus and Me

by Karina Gregory

For me lockdown abruptly started 6 weeks prior to its official time after tripping over a kerb and breaking a bone in my ankle. Although I was fortunate enough to be able to weight-bear I couldn't walk long distances to do shopping or take my guide dog for a long walk.

I ventured out on 12 March when we were in the implementation stage of social distancing. Like many of us, although I was taking it seriously, I don't think I fully appreciated just how bad the situation was and wondered if the media were taking it a bit too far.

However, when lockdown was imposed, I was determined about two things: I was NOT going shopping and that I needed to build up the strength in my ankle. For the latter, I used my daily exercise hour to walk a little bit further each day.

The first challenge to overcome was shopping. The lady who had been helping us out needed to self isolate so we needed to find a solution. I was already set up with online shopping but I had never used it and as we all found out, there was no chance of getting a delivery slot.

The thing that struck me was that visually impaired people had not been included on the priority lists for



Karina and Orca

support - although it was great to see Warwickshire Vision Support being so proactive checking up on the welfare of its service users.

After a few lively discussions with my GP surgery and local district council explaining the difficulties visually impaired people faced going out with the restrictions in place, we managed to get the support we needed from a friend's daughter and a referral to a community organisation made by the local council although the latter did take persistence. My family and

I were nominated by a member of Warwickshire Vision Support to receive a food parcel donated by Waitrose, for which we were very grateful.

For me, this showed the long path still needing to be travelled to have the needs of blind and partially sighted people truly recognised and understood by mainstream services. There are so many things that could be implemented that would make life so much easier for everyone.

As I said earlier, my second challenge was to build the strength back up in my ankle so that I would be able to give my guide dog a long walk.

Orca loves attention. Like me, he needed to adjust to social distancing. He couldn't understand why people in the street who would normally pamper him were keeping their distance. Meanwhile, I avoided potentially busy places and had to listen much harder to avoid getting too close to people.

On the occasions I have needed to go into a shop, I called ahead to ask what their arrangements were. Information is key, and calling ahead really can help. I'm pleased to report that so far everything has worked out well.

I am well aware though that this hasn't been the case for everyone. Moving forwards, through my work with the Coventry and Warwickshire branch of the National Federation of the Blind of the United Kingdom and Volunteer Campaign Coordinator with RNIB, I propose to work hard to ensure that as the lockdown is eased visually impaired people are no longer marginalised and are represented in decisions made locally across Warwickshire and Coventry. My current focus is ensuring that queuing systems are accessible, easy to follow and understand along with the integration of pop-up cycle lanes.

Stay safe.

Covid-19 Appeal

The ongoing Covid-19 crisis has affected many of our fundraising activities. As of 10th July we had raised £4,559 out of our £15,000 target to support our new telephone befriending and virtual support centre services.

If you want to make a donation to support our response to the crisis then you can send a cheque to WVS at 5 Charles Court, Warwick CV34 5LZ or make a donation through our website at www.warwickshire.vision

Thank you.

A-Z of Surviving the Lockdown

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues, here are a few ideas of what to do with all that time on your hands.

A Ambition – now is a good time to plan what you would like to do and achieve after lockdown.

B Boredom – this is an opportunity to investigate new interests and hobbies without any pressure.

C Cooking – make sure you have enough food and drink in your home and know who to ask if you need help to get any more. You may need to improvise but that's part of the experience!

D De-clutter - now is a good opportunity to get rid of all that junk. Set yourself an achievable target and gradually chip away each day.

E Exercise – walking is a great way to stay fit and it allows you to put into practice those mobility skills. You'll lose them if you don't use them!

F Friends and family - keeping in touch is so important during lockdown - people appreciate a quick 'hello'. Lockdown may have led to new friendships as different people enter your life to help in ways that may not have been necessary before.

G Garden – without the noise of aircraft its a great opportunity to fully appreciate the nature that has found its home in your garden.

H Help – whilst many visually impaired people have needed additional support throughout the lockdown there are also things that we can do to help the effort. Why not become a telephone befriender? Even if you are receiving the service, why not offer your skills to another service user.

I Interests – now you can dedicate more time to the things you enjoy rather than trying to 'fit them in' as and when you get the time.

J Juggling – take a step back, there is now less need than ever to juggle all of the things you have to do, so enjoy the rest!

K Keep going – we are all in the same situation, so understand that what you are going through is not unusual.

L Learn a skill such as a new language. You can download a free app: www.duolingo.com or even learn sign language.

M Money – has lockdown got you thinking about how you manage your money? Perhaps

now is the time for a new start. You can contact the Supersaver service for advice and information on 01926 411331.

N New Habits - always wash your hands thoroughly straight away when you return home. This is especially important for your health and safety.

O Opportunity - every day is an opportunity for self-improvement and its amazing what opportunities are available - even in such a dark time.

P People - when you're taking your daily exercise and keeping up those hard earned skills, make sure that people are a safe distance away from you. Listen as much as you can to what's going on around you to get an idea of where other people are.

Q Queen - we have heard from the Queen twice already this year and its reassuring to know she's there when we need her.

R Routine - this is important for your well-being and helps you get the most out of each day.

S Stress - this is a time of apprehension for many visually impaired people - not knowing what life is going to be like after lockdown. Try not to worry, it will be what it will

be and we should not worry about what we cannot change.

T Treatments - your treatment provider should have been in touch to tell you if they have cancelled or rearranged your appointment. If they haven't, and you are unsure, why not contact them?

U Useful information - the radio is a great source of useful information during the lockdown period.

V Visitors - as the lockdown is relaxed, think about how you will welcome visitors back into your home.

W Warmth - despite all of the gloom, a lot of warmth has been shown during this crisis. Let's try to sustain it into a brighter future.

X Xylophone - playing or listening to music is a great way to relax.

Y Yoga - it may be a bit of a stretch, but keeping your muscles flexible and strong will help your balance and prepare you for when you can go outside once again.

Z ZZZs - it's ok to have a lie in.



The Google Home Hub

Louise Jelley talks to George Yates about the Google Home Mini Speaker, one of the many smart speakers available

In March I worked at the Stratford support centre with some students from King Edward VI School who were carrying out some video interviews. I set up a Google Home Hub and demonstrated it. George, who is one of the Stratford regulars, said that he had one at home and he liked it to play him music. I asked George to join me in front of the group so he could ask Google a question. George came forward and said 'Google play some Vera Lynn'. Virtually instantly the device started playing a Vera Lynn tune and George and I started dancing, much to the merriment of the other service users. This image was captured and now features in our new promotional video.

In June, some 3 months later, I wanted to ask George how he was getting on with his Google Hub and what else he used it for.

I called George up on the phone and we had a chat.

Louise: 'George, what would you do if you didn't have your Home Hub anymore?'

George: 'I would feel lost, I rely on



it, it's my mainstay because I can no longer read.'

Louise: 'What do you use it for?'

George: 'Lots of things. It plays me music, I can ask it the time, the date, the weather. It knows I am in Stratford-upon-Avon so it will give me the local weather. I have even asked it about shops, and only yesterday asked it if the public toilets were now open and it replied by saying it didn't know. Sometimes I say to it 'Google do you love me?' and it replies 'yes of course.'

Louise: 'How do you get it to play music?'

George: 'Well you can pay a subscription for music if you want to but I don't do that. I just ask it to play

some Vera Lynn or Lonnie Donegan and it will play a tune. If I want some church music I will say 'Hey Google play me some church music' and it will.'

As soon as George said this, I could hear down the phone a female voice saying 'playing some church music,' in the background I could hear very clearly the sound and tone of a hymn. To stop it George would say 'Google stop playing,' and it would go silent.

George went on to say 'If I am feeling down and want cheering up I will sometimes say 'Google play me some cheerful music.'

Again, as soon as George said that I could hear a female voice in the background say 'music is available via a paid subscription service but I have found this which is cheerful.' A pop tune then started playing.

The commands George was using were simple and proceeded with the word 'Google'.

I asked George if he would recommend a smart speaker and he said 'As I cannot read due to my vision loss I rely on it. It is my mainstay for information and news - it is really useful.'

Other smart speakers are available, but this demonstrates, the range of questions you can pose to them and how beneficial they can be to someone living alone with sight loss.

The Warwickshire Vision Support promotional video is now available on our website www.warwickshire.vision

For more information about Smart speakers, read IT Bits and Bytes on page 30.

If you are considering buying a Smart Speaker, then it is important to know:

- Smart Speakers require a Wi-Fi connection.
- They require an Android or IOS (Apple) smart phone or tablet to configure initially and set up contacts, but these are not required for day-to-day general operation.
- Access to some skill services may require setup via the app on a smart phone or tablet, this includes setting up payment card data.
- Emergency calls are not currently supported.
- Calls to premium numbers are not supported.
- Check compatibility before purchasing.



Hebes
against
a wall

Gardening during Lockdown

by Louise Jelley

In March, when the country went into lockdown, many households suddenly found themselves facing new challenges. A little escapism was soon needed!

I joined the ranks of the reluctant gardeners in those early spring weeks stuck at home, and I'm very glad I made the effort. My garden is now a colourful, fragrant sanctuary, thanks to receiving just a little more care and attention than it normally gets!

Whilst still working, albeit from home, the time in the evenings and weekends that I would have normally given over to some other occupation was now free. Lockdown in effect forced me to become a gardener: to tend the borders, rearrange the shrubbery and fill the pots.

I now have borders bursting with geraniums, delphiniums, roses and

hebes, all providing a colourful display of blues, pinks and whites.

Low maintenance though, however, is my middle name, and a courtyard full of pots is my real passion. Pots afford you the opportunity to change your mind, move plants around and have different breakout areas; inviting in wildlife, colour, texture and sound. I have a range of Mediterranean cacti, a young fig tree, some herbs and lavender.

Plants can also bring a lot of pleasure and benefit inside the home, and again can be easy to maintain. I like small cacti which can be displayed on window sills. They love the warmth and require very little attention. Another favourite is the orchid - some would say a challenge to keep, but I soak the roots once a week, drain the plant and this seems to work, bringing back a wonderful display year on year.

Drought, flood or indoor thermostatic failure are no problem at all with artificial plants which provide bright, reliable and highly realistic displays to brighten your home. Many high street and online retailers stock them from as little as £2. Argos, Homebase and Wilko have lots to choose from and you can easily supplement a real cacti and orchid for equally lovely artificial ones.

My garden has become my saviour, my 2020 preoccupation. I never thought I'd be so thrilled at the sound of bees buzzing around the plant pots or a new flower opening. I highly recommend bringing a little greenery into your world.

A visual impairment need not signal the end of your gardening days. With a little help you too can create low maintenance, sensory wonderlands, full of evocative scents, textures, colours and sounds.

So where to begin? National charity, Thrive, helps people with a disability or underlying health condition to start or continue gardening. On their website you'll find a wealth of information about ways to 'carry on gardening', which is the charity's motto, regardless of disability or visual impairment. It provides useful advice on weeding, pruning, mowing and raking safely. Visit www.carryongardening.org.uk for more details.



Delphiniums
against a wall

Focus on Health

Mental Health and the Lockdown

by Vicky Sartain

As some of us begin to take steps into an 'eased lockdown' a new set of challenges awaits. Warwickshire Mental Health Service provides a wealth of information for anyone struggling with stress, anxiety and depression during these uncertain times. Their key advice for well-being is:

Connect –

Maintaining healthy relationships with people you trust is important for your well-being by whatever means available: telephone, video calls, online, or even a good old-fashioned letter if stamps, envelopes and a postbox are easily accessible.



Keep learning –

Challenge yourself with a new skill. With all this additional time at home, perhaps you could try new recipes, new interactive online games, online



educational courses or stream new music, audiobooks or listen to a podcast series.

The national charity Look UK (www.look-uk.org) offers poetry, fitness, music and more through its media channel for visually impaired people.

Be active –

If you're lucky enough to have a garden, this is a good time to be in it! Order plants and seeds online or visit a garden centre, and brighten up your space, inside or out, with scented blooms – or try growing vegetables and herbs. If you've reduced your time outside, exercising indoors can help you feel better. There are a number of videos, gadgets and apps on the market that can help you maintain your fitness and health.



Give – One way to connect with others is to volunteer. Roles such as befriending, where you call a vulnerable person for a chat, can be a lifeline for someone who may be

struggling owing to their age or circumstances. If you feel you could take on such a role, Warwickshire Vision Support is a good place to start within the VIP community. Call us on 01926 411331 for more information.



Take notice -

The feeling of the sun on our skin as we spend time outside, the scent of freshly mown grass or summer flowers, morning birdsong or church bells – these micro moments can have a huge impact on our well-being.



Contact - Don't hesitate to call Warwickshire Vision Support on 01926 411331 for help if you are in need of reassurance, guidance or practical matters. You can also visit the county website: www.warwickshire.gov.uk/mentalhealth and Mind: Coventry and Warwickshire at www.cwmind.org.uk for more well-being ideas and advice.

Useful Phone Numbers

Sight Loss Organisations

- Guide Dogs pandemic Helpline: 0800 781 1444
- Guide Dog support walking: 0118 983 8882
- Deafblind Helpline: 0800 132 320
- RNIB: 0303 123 9999
- Eye clinic emergencies UHCW: 0247 696 4802 / 0247 696 4800
- Warwickshire Sensory Services: 01926 410 410
- Sense: 0300 330 9256

General Organisations

- Age UK: 01926 458 100
- Citizens Advice: 0300 330 1183
- Mind: 0208 215 2243
- Warwickshire County Council Shielding Hub: 0800 408 1447
- Alzheimers Helpline: 0808 800 4104
- Dementia UK Helpline: 0808 800 4104
- Diabetic Helpline: 0345 123 2399

Priority Shopping

- Morrison's Doorstep Delivery: 0345 611 6111
- Tesco: 0800 917 7359

Spotlight on Equipment

One Cup Hot Water Dispensers

Boiling water at the touch of a button

For people living with sight loss making a hot drink can be problematic and a little scary. A variable one cup hot water dispenser takes away the lifting and pouring and so the possibility of over-filling the cup, when set correctly.

There are several hot water dispensers on the market costing between £30 and £60. They are fundamentally a kettle but with a one touch button that will dispense a measured cup of boiling water directly into the cup placed on the tray below the water outlet.

For a VIP the recommendation is for a variable dispenser. Whilst this version is more expensive, it dispenses just enough water to fill either a small tea cup, a large mug or several measured amounts in between, with one press of a button. A bump-on or two can be placed to select your favourite settings. The non-variable dispenser will only dispense around 250ml which is approximately a large mug-full. Some dispensers also include technology that filters out impurities in the water.

There are numerous suppliers including the Breville Hot Cup shown here. It can be filled from the tap

or via a jug, which we recommend. There are non-slip feet on the base keeping the whole unit steady. Some have an added safety feature of a manual 'stop' button to stop the flow of water instantly. Some will glow red whilst heating. One cup of hot water is dispensed in approximately 30 seconds, heating only that amount. The tank remains cold. It will only take up as much room on the kitchen counter as a traditional kettle.

To view a short video of the Breville One Cup Dispenser go to www.argos.co.uk/product/1219292



One Cup Dispenser

Audio Labeller - PenFriend

Approximately £83 excluding VAT

PenFriend enables you to record your own voice onto labels that come with the PenFriend. They are sticky-back labels so you can attach them to the items you want to identify. Each label can be re-recorded multiple times and can record a single message of up to 1 hour long. When you need to identify an item, simply place the PenFriend onto the label and it will play back your recording.

Some suggested uses

- Food labelling: what it is/how long to cook/reheat/use by date – can be used in freezer too.
- When shopping with a friend, why not label the items as they go into your basket so once you are home you can easily identify them.
- Shopping list - attach the label to your key fob or phone
- Name and notes on medication
- Organise paperwork – ask a friend/relative to read the letter onto a label, attach the label to the paperwork then you can access it at your leisure - time and again.
- Identify CDs/DVDs
- Spice racks
- Clothing – care instructions and/or the colour
- Ask a friend to record a recipe for you

You can view or purchase a PenFriend on the RNIB website or from other specialist suppliers.

Warwickshire Vision Support is able to demonstrate either of these items at our Vision Support Centres (when they re-open). If you would like to request a demonstration, please call our office and we will arrange for a member of our team to take the required item to the support centre at a convenient time.

A Rehabilitation Officer can also demonstrate these items at your home during an assessment.

If you are purchasing a piece of equipment that is specifically designed for people with a disability you should be able to buy without paying VAT.



Advice and Guidance

Super Saving - Literature

by Kate Perkins

Books are a huge part of many of our lives and during the past 5 months we have been asked a lot about reading material and how you can obtain free or paid audio books. This is what we found:

Warwickshire Library Service

Warwickshire Libraries allow borrowers to listen to a vast catalogue of digital audiobooks for free – and often you can borrow the same book with the same narrator as you would get on a paid service.

All you need is a login. You can then borrow up to seven audiobooks at a time.

You can join the library online at www.library.warwickshire.gov.uk

RNIB Talking Books

RNIB's Talking Books service is absolutely free - it gives you access to over 31,000 fiction and non-fiction books for adults and children.

There can be long wait times for new applications whilst turnaround time for books has extended due to current staffing challenges during the crisis.



The usual way of listening is by USB memory stick, however you can also listen by CD or digital download.

You can join by going to www.rnib.org.uk/reading-services

The RNIB Newsagent (free subscription during coronavirus)

Offering over 200 popular and best-selling titles including BBC History Magazine and Readers Digest, full text is available electronically so you can read with a screen reader of your choice or you can receive selected audio highlights by digital download or on CD or USB.

To take out a subscription call RNIB on 0303 123 9999 or email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Got an Alexa device? Listen to free audiobooks and short stories

If you have an Alexa-enabled device you can listen to selected audiobooks each month completely free – just say ‘Alexa, what’s free from Audible?’ to hear what’s available. You don’t need to have an Audible subscription or give any payment details. Past free titles have included Aladdin, Treasure Island, Sense and Sensibility and The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.

Amazon Audible are offering free classics at the moment

You don’t need to sign up or register (Normal Audible is £7.99 a month).

Just google – ‘Discover Audible’ click on the first link that appears. You will see free audiobooks for kids but underneath is an icon for literary classics. There are 33 titles to choose from including: Pride and Prejudice, Frankenstein, Jungle Book, War and Peace, also Romeo and Juliet.

Calibre Audio is free to join for anyone who has sight loss

Calibre Audio’s digital library service includes: Unlimited borrowing of over 11,500 unabridged audiobooks, available on streaming, download, memory stick and MP3 CD.

It offers free postage and no fines for late or lost audiobooks. Manage your account online at www.calibre.org.uk or by phone on 01296 432339

Listening Books

Listening Books is a postal and internet-based library service and membership starts from as little as £20 per year.

It is a UK charity providing a fantastic selection of audiobooks on MP3 CD through the post, or downloaded and streamed online.

If you would find it difficult to pay the membership fee, they have a limited number of free places available and may be able to help. Just tick the box on the online application at www.listening-books.org.uk to say you would struggle with the membership fee.

For more information call the enquiry line on 020 7407 9417

Kindleunlimited

Kindleunlimited has a current promotion of 2-month free trial (valid until 31 December 2020) renews at £7.99 per month. You can cancel your subscription at any time.

Unlimited audiobooks and magazines are available to download to any device with the Kindle app.



Sight for Sore Eyes

by Peter Pawson, Optometrist
Specialist at South Warwickshire
NHS Foundation Trust

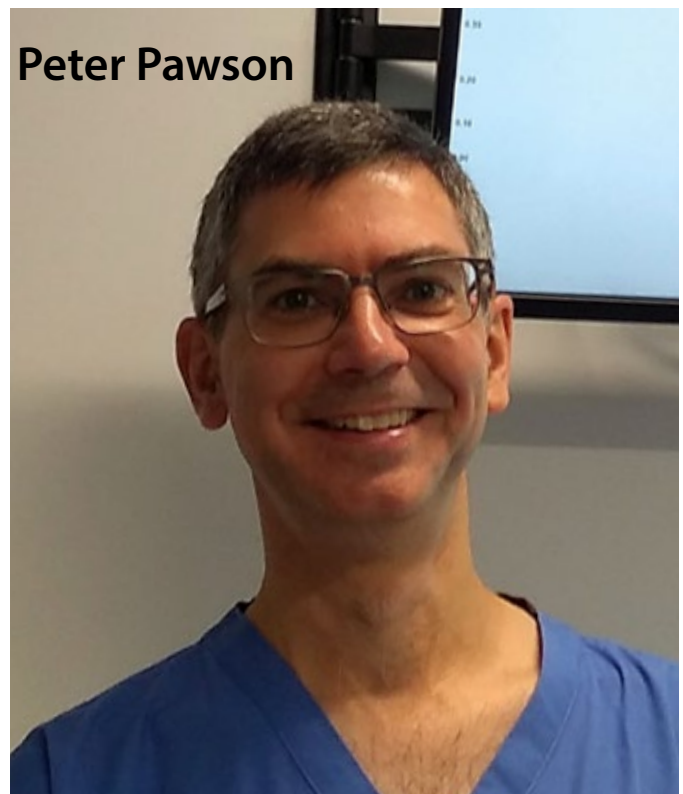
Vision UK is a charity which 'brings together organisations across the eye health and sight loss sector to deliver positive change for blind and partially sighted people'. Vision UK issued a statement in December 2019:

'We hope that 2020 will be a big year for eye health and sight loss and we would like to make it the Year of Vision'. This year was chosen not least because '2020 vision' means 'good vision', and Vision UK were keen to make the most of this 'happy coincidence'.

2020 vision (or, more accurately, 20/20 vision) is an indication that an eye can see, at a distance of 20 feet away, what a healthy eye would be expected to see at a distance of 20 feet away.

In the UK, we now work in metres, so the equivalent measurement is 6/6 vision, which indicates that an eye can see at 6 metres what a healthy eye would see at 6 metres.

Vision UK had high hopes for this year: promoting eye health to prevent vision loss, increasing eye-related research, helping to promote better care for those with sight loss...



But, as we know, the year has been 'hijacked' by a virus and as a result Vision UK is actually closing at the end of July, in the year that should have been its climax.

So how does all of this affect you?

In line with government guidance, routine check-ups in both the hospital and with community optometrists were stopped in March 2020.

Patients who were having regular injections in their eyes (for example, for wet age-related macular degeneration) have continued to be offered appointments at South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust during the lockdown period. We have also been seeing emergency

patients, who may have painful eyes or new visual loss.

If you experience any sudden changes to your vision, the advice remains the same as ever:

- Contact NHS 111 (either online on 111.nhs.uk, or by phoning 111), or
- Contact your GP who can treat or refer you to the Eye Department, as necessary

As we move into July, clinics are starting to reopen, following some 4 months of very limited activity. We aim to prioritise the most urgent patients, and the patients most at risk of significant visual loss.

The period of lockdown has made all of us more anxious, and this anxiety can make us worry about our eyes. Do contact NHS 111 or your GP if you notice any deterioration in your vision, particularly if it has worsened suddenly. Otherwise, please be patient as you await your next appointment.

As and when you do receive an appointment to attend the Eye Department, please be reassured that we are following all the relevant government guidance regarding social distancing, wearing personal protective equipment, minimising the time that you need to spend in the department, etc.

NB: This article was written in late June 2020.

Advice Desks

We plan to resume our hospital eye clinic advice desk service as soon as we are able.

Social distancing guidelines, the limited amount of space in the waiting rooms and the over-riding need to protect patients from infection at all times means that we must await permission to resume service.

However, we can still provide information and support by phone. You can either call us direct on 01926 411331 or ask a member of the eye clinic staff to make a referral on your behalf.





IT Bits & Bytes

Talking Smart Speakers by Ruth Okey

Smart speakers give you access to the internet by having a conversation with your new best friend. No need for screens, keyboards, mice, screen readers or magnifiers.

Smart speakers connect to the internet via a Wi-Fi connection, they use voice recognition to respond to your request. When you want to make a request you say the 'wake up' word for your device: 'Alexa' for Amazon, 'Hey Siri' for Apple and 'OK Google' for Google devices.

Smart speakers can be used to access all sorts of information:

- set a timer for 20 minutes
- what time is it?
- what's the news?
- play [artist]

Google and Alexa smart speakers can now make free calls to landline and mobile numbers within the UK. Contact names and numbers need to be configured in the app on a smart phone/tablet:

- call Warwickshire Vision
- call 01926 411331
- hang up

Additional smart devices can be purchased and controlled by your smart speaker. These include smart plugs that you can connect to the appliances you want to control, smart light bulbs or smart thermostats. Once configured you can give the command to turn on/off the device.

- turn on kitchen lights.

Lots of companies have written interfaces to smart speakers to give them extra skills, so you can ask your new best friend about:

- Travel and transportation: bus and rail enquiries
- Business and Finance: Lottery results, Premium Bond checker
- Movie and TV: TV guides
- Music: Amazon Music, Spotify, YouTube
- Shopping: Amazon Prime

There are different shapes and sizes and therefore costs of smart speakers, this is generally due to speaker quality and size of screen if present.

To find out more, please contact 01926 411331. Unfortunately, we cannot provide demonstrations until the lockdown is relaxed and our support centres reopen.

Summer Recipe

Summer Cup Trifle by Andrew Baker

Ingredients

- 1 strawberry jelly
- 1 cup Pimms or other fruit cup drink
- 1 jam Swiss roll
- 1 punnet strawberries
- 1 tin custard
- 1 carton whipping cream

Instructions

- Put tin of custard in fridge
- Make up the jelly in a heat-proof jug according to instructions but use half Pimms instead of COLD water
- While the jelly is cooling, slice up the Swiss roll and arrange in a bowl. Halve the strawberries and scatter them on top of the Swiss roll, reserving a few for decoration. When the jelly has cooled (but not set), pour it over cake and strawberries. Put in fridge until jelly is set
- Pour custard over top and return to fridge to set again
- Whip cream until it forms soft peaks, being careful not to over- whip. Spoon cream over custard. Return trifle to fridge to set
- Decorate with reserved strawberries and hundreds and thousands (optional)



Top tips

- Make sure there is enough space in the fridge for the trifle bowl
- Use powdered jelly rather than cubes as it is easier to dissolve
- Use plain madeira cake or trifle sponges
- Use a tin of ready mixed Pimms and lemonade. If you don't want to use alcohol, use lemonade instead
- Use raspberries or a tin of mandarins instead of strawberries (no chopping required)
- Use squirty cream (put it on trifle immediately before eating)
- Use a One Cup dispenser to boil the water - this saves lifting a hot kettle and dispenses the right amount of hot water for the jelly

Volunteer Awards 2020

Linda Willett has been volunteering with the Hamilton House Social Club in Rugby for over 5 years. She goes above and beyond and helps club members out even when she is not volunteering for WVS.

'Linda has helped me out on many occasions and nothing is too much trouble' said one nominator.



David Frankum is a Home Visitor in Nuneaton. David has been volunteering for 10 years and commits a full day to his home visits each week.

One nominator commented 'He goes above and beyond to rearrange visits to accommodate service users. He helps out with paperwork and filing and keeps records up to date.'



Karyl and Roger Rees are a husband and wife team who run the Alcester Social Club.

One of their nominators said 'Karyl and Roger do a wonderful job, we are so grateful for what they do for us. The Alcester Club is a lovely welcoming place to come and nothing is too much trouble. All of the volunteers do an amazing job.'



Kay Shaw has been volunteering as leader of the Rugby VIP Club for over 5 years. Kay never says 'no' and goes above and beyond every week making the club a very welcoming and enriching place.

Kay's nominator said 'Kay is so worthy of an award, she does so much for us all, she is so positive with a can-do attitude that makes such a difference to our lives.'



Lynne Rock has been volunteering for over 5 years and is currently one of the main driving forces behind the Atherstone Social Club.

One of Lynne's nominators said 'Lynne makes a real difference, she is not just a volunteer but a friend to whom we are very grateful for her support.'



Maggie Durston has been a Home Visitor and Club Helper for over 20 years.

A nominator said 'Maggie is amazing in so many ways, she has been a stalwart volunteer for many years. Maggie has looked after so many visually impaired people in the Southam area and has continued to maintain contact with them even after they leave the area.'



Myles Gillan, who is visually impaired, has been the leader of Coleshill Club for just over a year.

His nominator said 'Myles is always jolly and helpful. He has gone the extra mile by arranging refreshments from the local supermarket, booking our taxis and always being there to help or on the end of the telephone.'



Peter Muscott volunteers as an IT Trainer at our Stratford-upon-Avon Vision Support Centre. His role involves assisting and training visually impaired people to use Apple and Android phones and tablets on the Internet. One of his nominators said 'Peter is so friendly and patient, he takes his time and explains everything so well. What would we do without him?'



Daphne Bartlam (Dink) helped run the Atherstone Club for over 45 years. Dink has now retired but continues to attend as a member.

In recognition of Dink's long service to Warwickshire Vision Support she is awarded an Excellence in Volunteering Award 2020.



Claire Parker volunteers at the Nuneaton Vision Support Centre and the Club. We were told, 'Claire is consistently helpful, always friendly and goes the extra mile. She loves to chat and listen and when I arrive with my guide dog in the rain, she will always take my coat to dry and ensures we are comfortable.'

Mark Chamberlain joined us at the start of the pandemic. At the time, he was a self isolating NHS worker who wanted to do more. Mark undertook more telephone welfare checks than any other person and was efficient and thorough in ensuring that people got the support they so desperately needed.

Creative Writing

Strange Times

by Christine Ramble

Strange, unprecedented times. Locked down,
Alone, missing friends and family,
We all feel sadness, fear, insecurity,
And for us with impaired vision the added worry:
How would we shop for food and get around?

Then, out of darkness, chaos, something grew:
People pulled together, they volunteered
In thousands, befrienders rang, we clapped and cheered
Our NHS, we began to know our neighbours.
Help and support are there for me, for you.

And to improve our health and keep us sane
There's less traffic, clearer air and sky.
We find our strengths, learn skills, even try
To master social media, Zoom and Skype -
Quicker than snail-mail, cheaper than the train.

When these strange times are past we will look back
At good and bad, what we've gained and lost
Count the emotional and financial cost
And when we've sieved the diamonds from the rust
We'll see the rainbow shining on the track.



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with sight loss since 1911



Warwickshire Vision is available
free to people living with sight loss
in Warwickshire. This publication
is also available in digital audio
and by email.

For more information, please contact:

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Budbrooke Road,

Warwick CV34 5LZ

☎ 01926 411331

Email: enquiries@warwickshire.vision

Website: www.warwickshire.vision



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