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Winter 2020



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Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks are expressed to Rosemary Went, Rosalie Visick, Vicky Sartain, Karina Gregory and all contributors to the magazine. We also thank Kenilworth Talking News Association for producing the digital audio version of Warwickshire Vision.

In the Focus on Health section, source information was derived from the Association of British Dispensing Opticians website (Charles Bonnet article) and the Technology Networks website (Glaucoma article).

Editorial

by Phil Arkell - CEO

As we approach the end of 2020, I think many of us will be looking forward to the New Year with the hope that it brings some semblance of normality to our lives.

This year has seen unprecedented disruption to our daily lives. At WVS we have been forced to suspend some services and develop new ones.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff team who have endured considerable challenges to the way we work and yet have continued to deliver top quality services to all who needed them.

With the help of our incredible volunteers, we have brought comfort and joy to people living in isolation, provided emergency food aid during the initial lockdown and, I know on at least three occasions, raised the alarm and probably saved lives.

2021 we hope will be a year of rebuilding - a year where our traditional services will return, and new initiatives from our strategy review will improve our support to people living with sight loss across Warwickshire.

In the New Year, we are planning to host one-to-one Covid-safe support centres. These will be trialled at Nuneaton and hopefully replicated across the county.



We will be following strict guidelines with respect to taking temperatures at the door, asking questions about your physical health and ensuring that the correct PPE is worn. These measures are for your safety and the safety of the staff and volunteers who support these activities.

We will be offering magnifier sessions, IT training and an advice desk service. Access will be on an **appointment-only** basis with each person given a specific time and date to attend. This pilot scheme will test the water to establish the level of demand for individual services across the county.

In the meantime, please remember, if you need help, call us. If we cannot help, there is a good chance we can put you in touch with someone who can.

On behalf of the trustees, staff and volunteers of WVS, I would like to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

News Round-Up

New Strategy for a New Decade

by Phil Arkell

Warwickshire Vision Support has been through a period of significant change over the last 2 years. With your help we have achieved a great deal and yet there is so much more to do. RNIB estimates there are 20,700 adults and children living with sight loss in Warwickshire. Warwickshire Vision Support is in touch with 1500+ people out of a database of 3200 people. Of these 2114 are registered as blind or partially sighted.

A recent legacy gift gives us the opportunity to think strategically about the future, so in April 2020 we commissioned a review of our strategy. As we implement the recommendations we will use the legacy to make sure Warwickshire Vision Support is doing all we can to enable people with sight loss in Warwickshire to live the lives they choose.

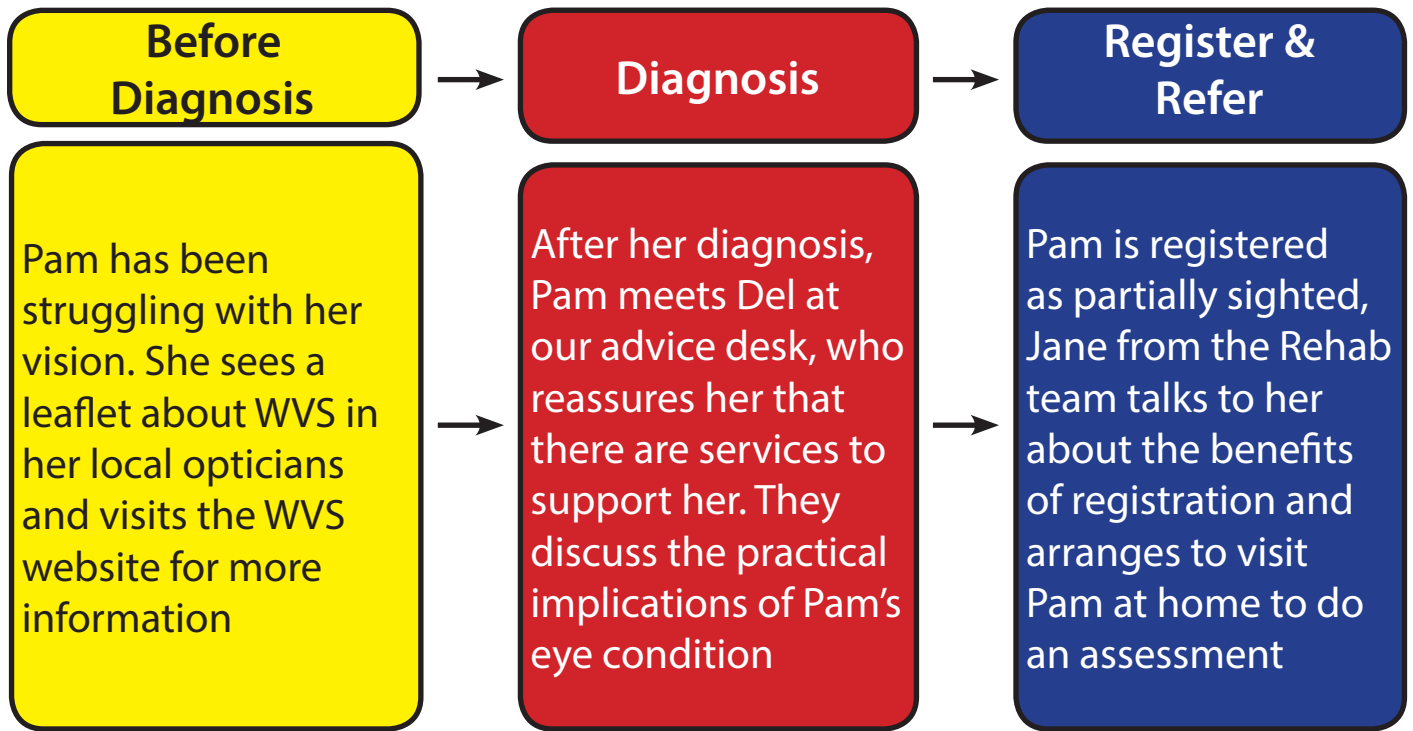
We carried out some research and spoke to almost 100 individual service users, volunteers, members of staff and external colleagues. Huge thanks to everyone who took part and especially to those who joined one of the telephone workshops. Your feedback was presented to

our board of trustees as part of the decision-making process.

The Trustees are focused on engaging with more people, being clear on our mission and doing things more effectively rather than necessarily doing more things. We want to develop partnerships with businesses and national charities and continue to work with Visionary (the umbrella organisation for local sight loss charities) to engage with other charities locally. We want to improve our efficiency by embracing new systems and processes and review the location of our base to become more accessible and more visible.

Service users of all ages told us that hospital eye clinics are a key point of contact. We know that in this time of coronavirus, disrupted eye clinic appointments are common. For some people, missing an appointment could mean risking further sight loss. At Warwickshire Vision Support we have a vital and timely role to play in supporting people to make informed choices as they manage their appointments. Service users also told us that our support centres play an important role in tackling loneliness

Joining up the journey for people living



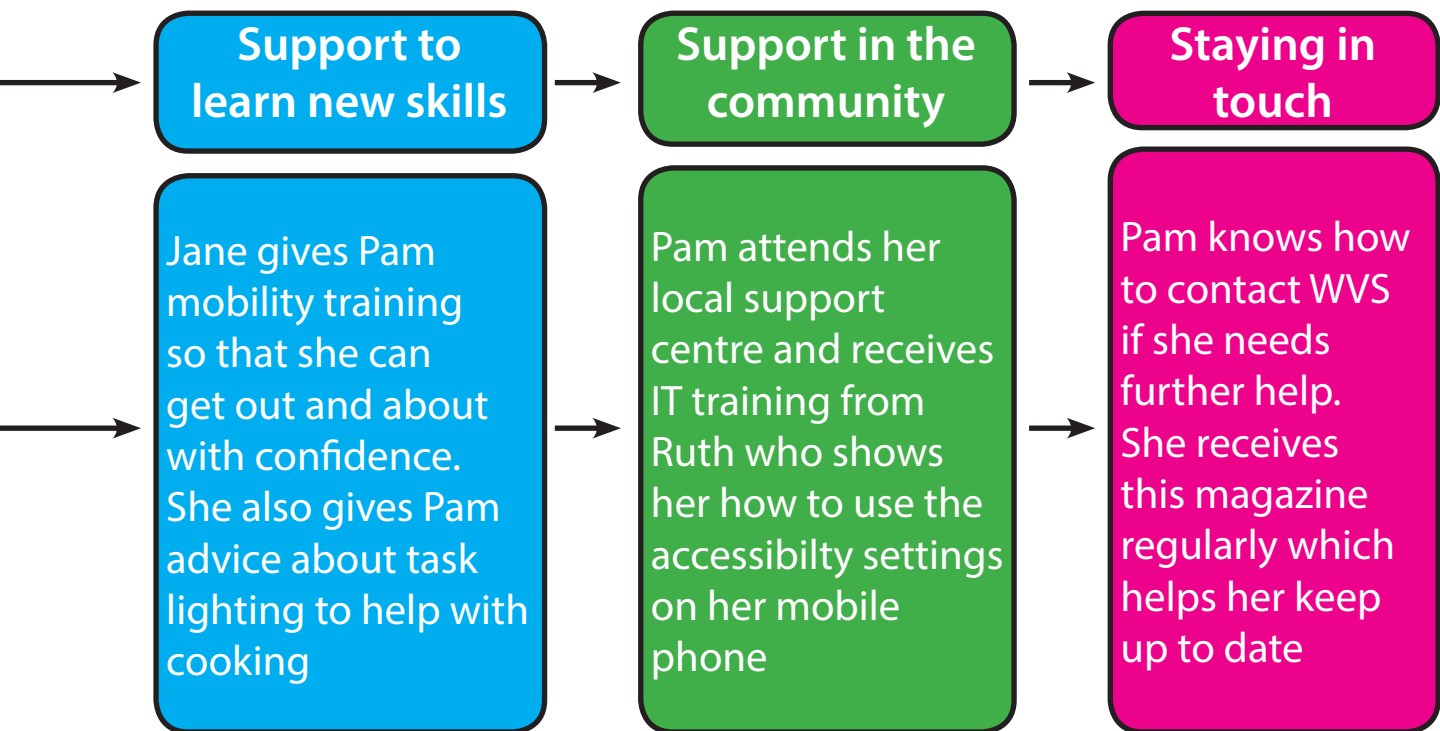
and isolation. Regular check-in calls from the charity would also be welcomed, especially by people who find it difficult to get out and about.

Our amazing volunteers are highly motivated by the difference they make to service users and the contribution they make to Warwickshire Vision Support. Almost all volunteers do a range of roles and many would be willing to do more – thank you! Volunteers told us they want to be kept up to date with what is happening. They are eager ambassadors, actively raising awareness of WVS. We want to give volunteers some tools to make spreading the word even easier. Feeling part of a bigger team is an important part of volunteering so we will develop and improve our communications especially for volunteers.

Our wonderful staff shared their views with great enthusiasm. They offered suggestions on how to make sure service users do not fall between the cracks, including introducing some new services based on learning from our response to the coronavirus crisis. Staff also see a hospital presence as a priority. They gave lots of ideas to make better use of our qualified Eye Clinic Liaison Officers (ECLOs) who work hard to develop excellent relationships with senior hospital staff and through them, to those who need our help.

Services were examined in detail. It is clear that Warwickshire Vision supports people at every stage of their journey with sight loss. However, rather than think of what we offer as a list of services, we will talk about how we join up the whole journey for people - from diagnosis

with sight loss in Warwickshire



in the eye clinic to independence and social inclusion in the community.

The diagram above is what we refer to as Pam's Story. Pam is a fictional service user who we use to try to ensure that we are meeting the needs all along the eye care pathway.

Next steps

We have established a number of work groups comprising staff, trustees and external volunteer advisors to develop the following recommendations:

- To carry out a strategic services review. To refocus the strategy on joining up the journey for people with sight loss
- To reach new people with relevant services by making the most of community links and partnership working
- To develop a marketing and communications strategy to increase our reach and raise awareness of WVS and its services
- To review our location to make us more visible and accessible
- To prepare for re-tendering for the WCC Rehabilitation Service contract and proposed clinical commissioning changes so that we are best placed to retain it
- To look after our people: to value our volunteers and staff
- To develop a new fundraising strategy
- To pursue efficiencies and become a learning organisation whereby we constantly improve our performance through experiential learning.

Welcome to the Board

We are happy to confirm that all nominated Trustees were elected successfully to the Board.

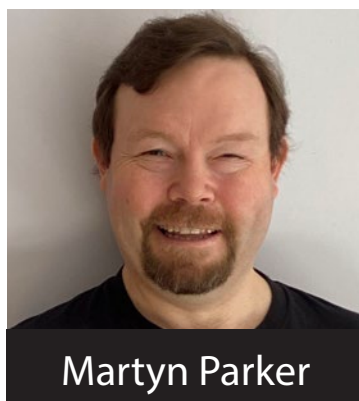
We have talked a great deal over the last few years about ensuring that WVS better reflects those we serve. We consider diversity to be fundamental to good governance and innovative and effective service provision. This year, we welcome three new VIP members to the Board, Melanie Pritchard, Martyn Parker and Stacey Fennell. Additionally, Amer Herian has been co-opted to the Board pending election next year.

Melanie Pritchard, many of you will know, worked for WVS some years ago, as our first IT Trainer, and is now a regular IT volunteer at Leamington and Rugby support centres with her guide dog Vector. Melanie is a former Braille tutor.



Melanie Pritchard

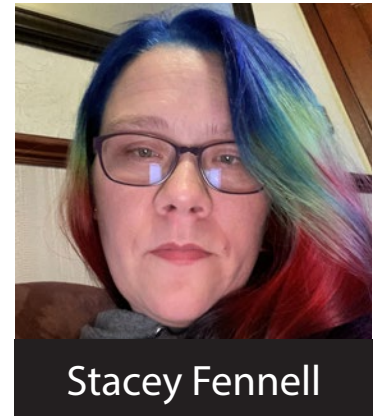
Martyn Parker worked for Warwickshire County Council for 30 years, mainly in finance. Martyn first had contact with WVS in



Martyn Parker

1987 when he received mobility training – he later ran the London marathon for us in 1990. Martyn is a guide dog user and is active in the charity sector, fundraising for PHAB, Guide Dogs and the Air Ambulance.

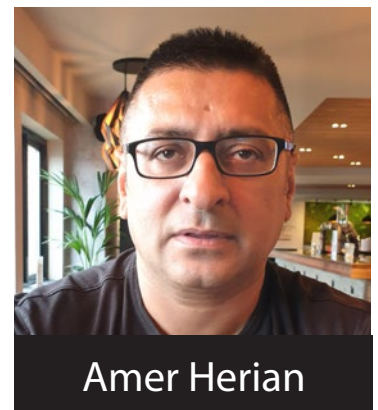
Stacey Fennell is currently studying for her law degree having worked in HR for some years. Despite being a student and a busy mother with



Stacey Fennell

a young family, she still finds time to put something back into her community. Stacey was registered sight impaired at an early age.

Amer Herian was co-opted to the Board just after the recent election. He has enjoyed a long career in IT and has been responsible for delivering IT solutions to disabled workers. Until 2019, Amer was a board member of the Transformational Council for the Royal National College for the Blind. He also volunteers for his local Citizens Advice office.



Amer Herian

Farewell to outgoing Trustees

As we welcome our new Trustees, we must also say farewell to those who are retiring from the Board. We wish Alan Last and Christine Ramble all the best for the future and thank them for their contribution.



Christine Ramble

We would especially like to recognise the immense contribution of Rosemary Went. After more than



Rosemary Went

25 years on the Board, Rosemary has witnessed, participated in, and recorded in this magazine so many changes across the charity. There is very little that Rosemary does not know about WVS and her knowledge has always proved to be a very useful archive to those of us who have only been around for a short time.

In 2000 Rosemary was asked by the Chairman of WAB to edit WAB Mag - now Warwickshire Vision. Together with Rosalie Visick and a number of volunteers, Rosemary and her team have produced three editions every

year delivering information and entertainment to the membership.

In 2010 Rosemary took the magazine digital - moving away from audio cassettes to memory sticks. This process required USB players to be delivered across the county and recipients demonstrated their use.

Later that year, WAB Mag captured our history in a special centenary edition - this was perhaps the first time our history had been researched and collated for posterity.

This magazine has been a mainstay of our communications for two decades. Thank you Rosemary for your commitment and dedication.

Your Board of Trustees

- Liz Thiebe, Chair
- Richard Orme, Vice Chair
- Keith Eales, Treasurer
- Heather Fairbairn, Secretary
- David Adams, Member
- Stacey Fennell, Member
- Amer Herian, Co-opted Member
- Janet Hurrell, Member
- Martyn Parker, Member
- Melanie Pritchard, Member
- Mark Rogers, Member
- Sheila Venville, Member



Four-legged friends

by Vicky Sartain

The Warwickshire-based Guide Dogs National Breeding Centre is the operational heart of the charity's vital work, providing those in need with a four-pawed solution to happiness.

With its unassuming base just outside Leamington Spa, the Guide Dogs National Breeding Centre has been bringing prospective hope to the blind and visually-impaired for nearly a decade. Work at the centre covers everything from the beginnings of new life all the way through to training and matching young dogs with potential life partners – and demand is high.

The website states that up to 1,500 puppies can be bred each year,

and since opening in 2011, nearly 11,000 puppies have entered the world, usually born at the homes of volunteers before arriving at the centre when they are a few weeks old. Prior to the pandemic, public tours of the centre were a regular thing, providing insight into the work that goes into developing a new generation of life-changing canines.

Hannah Fellows, Breeding Service Advisor, said: "At the centre, pups have round the clock care from the trained centre staff and regular interaction with volunteer puppy socialisers. Only the best quality dogs, in terms of health and temperament, are accepted onto our breeding programme."

The centre earmarks around a third of puppies from birth as potential breeding stock, but only a few will meet the requirements needed for the honourable role of dog parent.

Hannah continued: "During their first year, any puppies that are being considered for the programme undergo extensive health checks before the best of the best are accepted onto the programme at around 18 months old. Of course, welfare is the top priority for us. All of our guide dog mums and dads have the best of care."

Despite the ongoing pandemic, the important work of the Guide Dogs' volunteers has not faltered. Linda and Keith Tindall homed guide dog mum, Orla, in 2015. Instead of starting her formal training at around a year old, Orla, a German Shepherd, is one of a small number selected by the charity to become a guide dog mum.

Orla became pregnant in early February, and gave birth to nine guide dog puppies on 31 March, seven boys and two girls. Linda said: "Having a litter at home to care for during the lockdown gave us something nice and positive to think about and was definitely a good distraction."

"Guide Dogs provided us with brilliant support over the phone. Tim, our Supervisor, called us weekly on FaceTime to check on Orla and her pups and to give us any advice we

needed. It's comforting to know that staff are only a call away if we ever have any questions."

Litters are born in volunteers' homes as this provides the best environment for both guide dog mums and their puppies. During the 6 to 7 weeks that the pups stayed with the couple, they were introduced to different sights and sounds, helping to prepare them for their future training.

After this, when coronavirus restrictions allowed, the puppies were placed with volunteer puppy walkers where they would stay for around a year.

Matthew Bottomley, Head of Breeding Operations at Guide Dogs, said: "During the early stages of the Covid-19 outbreak, we paused our breeding programme temporarily, helping us to manage the number of puppies we are caring for during this challenging time."

A guide dog begins its training at around 12-14 months old at a training centre, such as the Guide Dogs site based in Leamington Spa. In normal circumstances, most dogs qualify as working guide dogs by the age of two.

There are many inspiring stories of the impact guide dogs make to people's lives, giving their owners independence, company, affection, as well as welcome responsibility. Matching a fully-trained guide dog

with a human companion, much like any good partnership, needs all the right elements to be a success. There are many things the charity considers but typically it's about pairing active dogs with active people, using larger dogs as stability aids for those with mobility and balance difficulties, and taking into account other personal needs, such as any pet allergies a person may have; hypo-allergenic curly-coated dogs or poodle crosses are usually a wonderful alternative to

the labradors and golden retrievers for which the charity is best known.

Warwickshire Vision Support provides mobility training for service users before being allocated a guide dog. If you think you would benefit, please get in touch with WVS on 01926 411331 or email enquiries@warwickshire.vision

For more information on any aspect of Guide Dogs, you can visit www.guidedogs.org.uk

On top of the world

Wendy Pope shares her experience of climbing Ben Nevis

I'm Wendy Pope, and I was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa when I was 7 years old. For years, I did not want to acknowledge my visual impairment.

I went to a mainstream school - where I was considered dangerous with a hockey stick. I never talked about what I could and couldn't see, and never felt as connected as other children.

I continued to mask my deteriorating eyesight as I got older - although I did secretly attend the Warwickshire Vision Support 'drop-in' centre and received long cane training from the Rehabilitation Workers. I continued to dismiss my eye condition, but was bumping and bruising myself all the time.

Eventually, I decided to embrace my visual impairment. I applied for a Guide Dog and within 4 months of leaving work was given Lily. That was a few years ago now.

I have received so much support from Warwickshire Vision Support over the past 15 years, that I decided I would like to take on a challenge and raise money for the charity. I have for a long time wanted to climb Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in the British Isles - standing at 1,345 metres.

I was due to make the climb in June, but that was cancelled because of COVID. I kept training, which involved walking a lot with my guide dog Lily, and also going to the gym.



On Monday 14 September, I set off on the climb with my guide David Tromans. The path up was quite difficult to climb, but the scenery and greenery were absolutely beautiful. When we reached an area called the Red Burn, which is about half way up, there are a couple of streams that you have to cross. The water looked so refreshing and I was pleased that I was able to wade through the ankle-deep spring water.

When at last I reached the summit I just collapsed to my knees. Apparently there was a rainbow overhead as we reached the summit. My favourite moment was just sitting on the top of Ben Nevis.

My husband was waiting for me at the bottom, and whilst I would have loved to jump for joy, I was quite unable - my legs felt very wobbly.

I felt such a sense of achievement to get down safe and sound. The climb and return took me 10 hours and 40 minutes, but it was so worth it.

I would like to thank David Tromans, my guide, and Warwickshire Vision for all the help I was given to achieve this.

Wendy has raised £1,347 for Warwickshire Vision services in the Nuneaton area. That is just over £1 for every metre climbed!



Simon and Sue at
Rugby Talking News

Talking Newspaper Heroes

by Phil Arkell

We have all experienced challenges over the last 8 months. Many services have been suspended whilst others have changed beyond recognition. However, throughout the pandemic, some of our local talking newspapers have gone the extra mile to make sure that people living with sight loss are not denied their weekly news.

The Rugby Talking Newspaper had only recently moved into the Thornfield Indoor Bowls Club when the pandemic began and consequent lockdown was introduced. Social distancing rules and the closure of public places meant that the talking news would either have to suspend operations or take drastic action.

For Simon Ainley and his wife Sue, there was only one decision to be made. With only a few hours

before the lockdown took effect, they headed up to the bowls club and loaded the car with as much equipment as possible. The talking news was coming home with them.

For the last 8 months, with remote assistance from Sean Butterfield, Tony Wilding and Jill Bass, Simon and Sue have produced the Rugby Talking News. Each and every week, they have edited articles from the local papers, narrated stories, edited the audio, copied it on to the memory sticks and sent them out to the 80 plus local listeners.

This remarkable effort has not only taken over their lives but also their home. Under normal circumstances, Rugby Talking News boasts upwards of 70 volunteers comprising technical engineers, editors, readers, copiers and the teams responsible

for packing and sending out the memory sticks.

In the case of Stratford Talking News, Maureen Beckett and Jan Stanton stepped up to the mark. Without missing a week of publication, they initially considered relocating to their home but then received permission to continue production at their studio in the Methodist Church. They were fortunate enough to have their own entrance/exit and so could function independently.

Maureen told me that having completed a full risk assessment, they realised that they would not need to relocate - that they could work safely and respect social distancing.

After 10 weeks, Maureen and Jan were joined by Carol Hunt and the team has continued to deliver top quality recordings to their 80 listeners.

We have recently learned that Jacky Williams a stalwart of the service will be retiring after 35 years service. We wish her well.



The Stratford Talking News Team

Both Kenilworth and Nuneaton Talking Newspapers were forced to suspend operations. Unfortunately, their studios were based in community buildings which were inaccessible during the lockdown.

We must also be aware that many of the volunteers are of retirement age and many were shielding - the safety of all volunteers has to come first when deciding whether it is possible to produce a talking newspaper.

We were particularly happy that Gerry Lawrence and his team at Kenilworth managed to open up the studio during the summer to produce the audio version of this magazine. The team spent several hours devising a safe scheme so that no more than two people were present in the studio at the same time. This included doing some of the work at home. The result was that when this was implemented they found that the whole process took several days instead of the usual one.

It is important that we remember just how important talking newspapers are to our community. Generations have relied on them not just to receive local news but to be able to participate in community events and activities.

We celebrate all our talking newspapers and thank their volunteers for their remarkable commitment and dedication.

Making a difference

WVS telephone befriending service by Karina Gregory

When lockdown was imposed at the end of March, I wanted to play my part in making a positive difference rather than constantly feeling like a 'recipient'. I was delighted to receive a well-being call from Vicky from WVS, who asked me if I would like to receive a telephone call each week. My response was "Can I help you make them?" As a volunteer already, it was easy for me to slip into this role and I have gone on to befriend three people, each with their own

stories to tell and unique set of circumstances. I personally found it a highly rewarding volunteering role particularly as it was something I could participate in fully and offer much to.

Befriending provides both the befriender and befriended person with opportunities to learn new things, pursue new hobbies, develop interests, share memories, build confidence, establish friendships and expand networks.

Adi Burch – Volunteer and Martyn Parker – Service User, would like to share their personal experiences of the WVS telephone befriending service.

I'm Adi Burch, and I started volunteering for WVS in May this year. I saw a WVS Facebook post on the Southam Community Spirit page and thought that befriending might be something I could do during lockdown. I have Macular Retinoschisis, and whilst my eyesight is now OK, I have had to undergo three operations, so I felt I would be able to empathise with a visually impaired person.

The process of becoming a volunteer was quite straightforward and I soon was allocated two people to call. I call



Martyn Parker, and it is fair to say that we are never short of conversation topics. We talk about films, books, music, sport, childhood, holidays, and all sorts of things.

For me personally, I have enjoyed giving something back to the community. I'm unable to drive, so

telephone befriending seemed ideal to me and as I am also on my own, it's nice for me personally to have that connection with someone else. I often make the calls whilst relaxing on my sofa.

When I'm not making my befriending calls, I keep myself busy sewing. During lockdown, I made 150 laundry bags for the NHS, 240 fabric hearts, ear protectors, headbands and face-masks. I also run a local Brownie and Guide Unit, but at the moment, all meetings are done via video.

I would encourage anyone to get involved in telephone befriending. I have found it really rewarding and you will too.

Martyn Parker is a Trustee and service user

I'm Martyn Parker and I have been associated with Warwickshire Vision Support in many ways for a number of years, in fact since 1987! Prior to lockdown, I would attend the Vision



Support Centre in Leamington Spa occasionally, and I rely on WVS to supply my long canes.

I have been receiving the telephone befriending service since June, and I really appreciate the weekly call that Adi makes. I was on my own, shielding, for 15 weeks, apart from the company of my guide dog Wheeler. It was good to have someone to talk to. Adi is a very engaging person and we spend a lot of our conversations laughing. We hit it off straight away, we laugh a lot, poke fun at each other and generally have fun. Over the weeks we have become friends and we talk about a whole range of subjects. I look forward to her Wednesday evening call.

If anyone is considering the telephone befriending service, then I would say 'go for it.' Don't stress, because whoever is allocated to call you is doing it because they want to help. Relax and enjoy the conversation.

For me personally, this has been a really positive experience. Out of the difficult situation that Covid has created, being forced to 'stay home' for all those weeks, I have met and got to know someone I would never have met otherwise. This is called a 'befriending service' and I have made a new friend through it.

Thank you WVS.

Staying in, working out!

Fitness, fun and flexibility: why you should try British Blind Sport's new online workouts.

As with many other sport and physical activity providers, the coronavirus pandemic has encouraged British Blind Sport (BBS) to adapt its delivery of services and explore the world of audio-led virtual exercise classes specifically for people living with sight loss.

In the weeks following the initial UK lockdown, British Blind Sport ran a 'live workout week' offering various live and audio-led exercise sessions across the week. After the initial launch, BBS ran a 'Workout Wednesday' offering a different (and free!) live session each Wednesday – either before or after work. These classes varied from boxercise to dance and were hugely popular.

BBS also set up a Facebook group dedicated to staying active at home, where members could discuss what they were doing to stay fit and healthy during lockdown and how they stayed motivated. This group has more than 500 members and is still going strong 8 months later.

As restrictions began to differ vastly across the UK, BBS decided to change their Workout Wednesday programme to something with more flexibility and permanence. Rather

than one workout per week, BBS now runs a live workout week at the beginning of each month with a different inclusive class each night from Monday to Friday at 6pm.

Following these live workouts, BBS will release 'follow up' exercise sessions for each different class so that participants can improve and build on their performance throughout the month – until the next live workout week.

As well as this, one instructor per month will be setting a challenge for the participants, whether that's who can do 10 burpees the quickest or the most punches in 30 seconds – with the chance for competitors to win prizes!

BBS thinks this new programme will offer more structure to the live workout participants, with the pre-recorded follow-on sessions allowing them to take part, whenever they have time, and motivating them to progress in their chosen classes.

One participant said: "I'm finding these workouts fantastic! Currently, I am self-isolating and can't get out to walk or run. These workouts are keeping me sane!"

Another said: "It's nice to do exercise alongside other people (even virtually!) and have very



motivating instructors who speak to the participants and correct our positions. It's a great idea!"

National Partnerships Manager, Alex Pitts, commented: "With our usual method of delivery being postponed, it was important for all of us at British Blind Sport to find a new way to engage our members and service users, providing ways for them to stay active and healthy at home – and I think we found the perfect solution. Now that restrictions are beginning to change and are so varied for people, depending on where they are in the UK, it's important for us to change up our programme and make it more flexible for our participants, but still encourage them to be active and hopefully see their own progression.

"This programme has also given us a platform on which we can tackle the increased isolation that people with disabilities are facing during social distancing. Connecting with people, even virtually, is so important for

good mental health and if we can help people come together through exercise then we deem it a success.

"Our live sessions have allowed us to create an online library of workouts, which are available on our website. This means that anyone can visit our website and find lots of VI-inclusive exercise classes, whether they want something low intensity like yoga or Pilates or want to go all out with a high energy HIIT class!"

British Blind Sport's 'at-home workout' programme was launched in November. To get involved, you can sign up to their mailing list at bit.ly/BBSMailingList or join their Facebook group 'British Blind Sport: Active at Home' by visiting bit.ly/BBSWorkoutAtHome

For more information, please contact BBS Participation Officer, David on david@britishblindsport.org.uk or phone **01926 424247**.

Reinventing Me

by James Morrison

I'm James Morrison, and I have been asked by Warwickshire Vision to share my story about weight loss as a VIP.

In just 8 months, I have lost 6 stone. My weight prior to lockdown was 17 stone, and I am now 11 stone.

Why, and how, you might ask. Well, as a younger man, I kept fit and enjoyed martial arts, which would take upwards of 20 hours each week. When I moved to Stratford-upon-Avon and got married, I kind of took my eye off the ball and my weight ballooned from 13 stone to 18 stone. Stress played a part. Getting married and being busy with college studies got in the way of exercising. I resigned myself to my new size.

Over the years I tried a few diets, counting calories and 'syns', but was unable to sustain them. I have always enjoyed eating out and any formal exercise routines ceased long ago. I have never been lazy though, and was always out and about volunteering and getting involved with projects, including creating a garden with the Forest of Hearts charity at Stratford Hospital.

Having been unwell last winter, in January I started to think about myself. I have always been so busy helping others, including being a full time carer for my wife, that I never put my health first. To start with I visited my doctor and discussed options which included joining a



James before lockdown



James now

gym. By the time March arrived and lockdown commenced I had lost 7 pounds, but my gym closed, exercise was restricted to one hour a day outside and obtaining provisions was a challenge.

I was not going to be defeated by lockdown though, and instead I took to my Wii Fit balance board. Nintendo Wii is a games console and a balance board is an attachment on which you can get involved with virtual exercise which includes walking, running, boxing, skiing and even playing golf and tennis.

I combined a slightly reduced calorie intake with a significant uptake in exercise. During lockdown I committed to 4 hours a day to exercise on the Wii Fit balance board. To start with I did a lot of shadow boxing and aerobic exercise.

On 19 June, one day after lockdown ended, I left the house for the first time in 3 months. I started by walking from my house to the Greenway in Stratford which was a 16-mile round trip. By 18 August I had walked more than 1.7 million steps. A combination of using a virtual exercise platform and walking outdoors has helped me achieve my weight loss goal. Now that the weather is starting to deteriorate, I am back indoors using the Wii Fit again and trying to run for 2 hours a day. I would like to get back to the gym and eventually tone up the bingo wings!

I raised a little bit of money for Diabetes UK when completing their million step challenge, but it was never about the money, it was about me taking back control over my health and fitness and creating an improved me.

My advice to anyone considering losing weight or taking on a new fitness challenge is to:

1. Consult your doctor first, especially if you have underlying health conditions.
2. Purchase a fitness tracker which will monitor steps and exercise completed and also can record calorie intake.
3. There is no such thing as 'syn'-free foods. Everything contains calories; some are hidden, so check the labels.
4. A little reduction in food intake and an increase in exercise is more enjoyable than denying yourself treats.
5. If you are interested in walking or jogging, invest in a pair of running socks which will help cushion and protect your most valuable asset, your feet.
6. Don't beat yourself up if you mess up. Sometimes, you have to fall off the wagon in order to get back on it.
7. Enjoy life and make any changes you make, about you, for you.

Focus on Health

Fight for Sight funds new research into Charles Bonnet Syndrome

by Jemma Davoudian

Fight for Sight has announced funding, in collaboration with Blind Veterans UK, Esme's Umbrella and Health and Care Research Wales, for two new research projects taking place at Cardiff University and the University of Oxford.

Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS) is an often overlooked condition whereby VIPs experience hallucinations as part of their eye condition - something which is far more common than people think. Lack of awareness and confusion with the onset of dementia are just two of the reasons why investment into CBS research is paramount. Lockdown due to Covid-19 has exacerbated the condition for many – campaign group Esme's Umbrella says calls to their CBS helpline have doubled in the past 5 months.

The team at Cardiff University has developed a method of inducing controlled hallucinations in the lab in order to explore CBS. Using fully sighted participants, this study will test the hypothesis that peripheral vision is more 'suggestible' than central vision. Since CBS patients experience long-term central vision

loss, and therefore rely more on their periphery, it would stand to reason that they are more prone to hallucinatory experiences.

University of Oxford researchers will use Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) methods to compare the brains of people with and without Charles Bonnet Syndrome. This will enable them to measure the chemical levels present in key visual areas of the brain, and clarify whether abnormal levels might be linked to CBS hallucinations.

Both studies will enhance our comprehension of the cause of CBS hallucinations, leading to future research that has the potential to develop and test effective interventions which could help improve CBS symptoms.

If you feel you may be experiencing CBS, please contact us or learn more at: www.rnib.org.uk/eye-health/eye-conditions/charles-bonnet-syndrome-cbs

To contact Esme's Umbrella CBS helpline call: **020 7391 3299** (lines are open 24 hours per day)

Gene therapy shows promise as a glaucoma treatment

by Jemma Davoudian

Glaucoma is a common eye condition which is caused by optic nerve damage. Many factors, including age and ethnicity, can increase proclivity towards developing glaucoma.

However, it is widely accepted that current clinical interventions for glaucoma are imperfect, and glaucoma continues to be a leading cause of blindness worldwide.

It has been shown that a reduction in interocular pressure (IOP) can prevent sight loss, regardless of the specific condition. Various methods for reducing IOP have subsequently been studied. At present, most newly-diagnosed glaucoma patients will be prescribed a programme of pressure-reducing eye drops. These drops require continual adherence which can be difficult to maintain for patients. Glaucoma is a chronic condition with continued deterioration over time; unfortunately, there is no current cure.

A gene therapy treatment, administered as an injection, is therefore an attractive proposition for all. Now, a team led by visiting senior research fellow at Bristol Medical School, Dr Colin Chu, has published

its findings in the *Molecular Therapy Journal* following the successful treatment of a mouse model of glaucoma using a single injection.

In their original paper, scientists described how gene editing was used to inactivate a gene in the ciliary body of the eye, therefore decreasing IOP.

The majority of vision research is initially conducted using mouse models. However, these promising results endorse clinical trials in the near future.

Dr Chu said, "If it's successful it could allow a long-term treatment of glaucoma with a single eye injection, which would improve the quality of life for many patients whilst saving the NHS time and money."



Photo by Emin BAYCAN on Unsplash

Spotlight on Equipment

Let's Talk Gadgets

by Jane Thorn

It's amazing the difference a simple thing, like a bump-on attached to your microwave, can make to your cooking isn't it? Easy, cheap and it works!

But what is available for VIPs in the kitchen at the other end of the market? A lot of talking stuff is the answer!

Washing machines (yes, really), microwaves, jugs, kitchen scales, timers and clocks, thermometers, tin lids and labels to name a few.

Things to consider about talking gadgets are the voice preference, a male/female/electronic, and the volume range.

Talking Kitchen Scales start at around £40. Some come with a jug or bowl and announce the weight in kg/g or pounds and ounces.

Tare (zero) function – allows you to zero measurements before adding further ingredients.

Consider: colour: don't purchase white scales if your kitchen counter tops are also white – think contrast.

Talking Food Thermometers measure in Celsius or Fahrenheit. Some also have an LCD screen that

displays the temperature in large font size. Cost from £25

Consider: does it turn itself off and/or revert to standby mode to preserve battery life?

Talking Tin Lids cost from £6 and are round magnetic re-recordable devices that can attach to your tinned goods. As you put your shopping away, record what's in the tin. They attach to any metal surface. Can also be used for leaving short messages to someone in your home, record a shopping or to-do list. Note, check the recording time – some play for 20 seconds, some 40 seconds. Remember, recording will wipe out any previous message.

Talking Kitchen Timers cost from about £10. Some have LCD display in large figures.

Adapting the thing you already have is often the best way forward as you are familiar with that piece of equipment. We encourage all VIPs to use the vision they have, but we all love a gadget. Talking gadgets are great, but sometimes we want a peaceful life. So here are a few more ideas for items that don't answer back!



There is a wide selection of kitchen equipment available

- A plate guard to help stop food from spilling over the edge
- Measuring spoons and cups
- Finger guards to wear when chopping and slicing
- Fruit and vegetable cutters to help cut items safely and neatly. Also, slicers, choppers and multi-choppers
- A rolling pin that can accurately roll out different thicknesses of pastry
- Oven rack guards and gauntlets to prevent burns

Maybe this year when you're asked what you'd like for Christmas, you will ask for one of the few things mentioned here. Merry Christmas.

Advice and Guidance

Not Quite Business as Usual

by Christine Huber

The Rehabilitation service is a face-to-face service. A home visit gives us the chance to meet someone in their own environment, enabling us to offer advice on how to manage the practical aspects of day-to-day life.

During the first lockdown, when these visits were suspended, it was very difficult for everyone. We had little choice but to provide information and support by telephone.

I am now happy to say that home visits have resumed, albeit in a very different format.

Prior to any home visit we conduct a comprehensive 'Covid' risk assessment to ensure that both parties are happy for the visit to proceed and that it can take place safely. For all visits, we wear a mask, gloves, apron and goggles as needed.

Unfortunately, these necessary precautions can make communication a little challenging - it can be difficult to hear a person through a face mask, particularly if one is hard of hearing.

During the summer, we were able to conduct many assessments outside in the garden, but as the weather

closes in, we have to meet inside the home more frequently.

If we do come into your home, please do not be offended by the fact we will not sit down and we will respect social distancing. This is for your own safety. The fewer things we touch, the less chance of any transmission of Covid-19.

We have also reduced the number of visits we carry out per day to prevent any chance of cross contamination - anything we bring into your home is cleaned and disinfected to minimise the risk of transmission.

The safety of both our service users and staff is paramount.

Fortunately, outdoor mobility work poses less risk of Covid transmission since we are not in enclosed spaces, are able to easily maintain social distancing and the PPE is less intrusive.

We are constantly working to improve our services, to have the most impact, and be effective in what we do - we thank you for your patience and flexibility.

Please contact us if you have any questions or queries. We are definitely open for business.

Home comforts

Gregory Bastin tells Louise Jelley how he has coped with housebound challenges during lockdown, and discovered a new hobby as a result.

Greg, how did you become involved with WVS?

I had a brain tumour in 2011, which required several operations over a number of years. Unfortunately, my eyesight was affected by the tumour. I contacted WVS in the autumn of 2019 with a view to being assessed, but then underwent a further operation that has actually improved my vision no end.

How did you cope during lockdown?

I felt low at times and frustrated as I was unable to go out and my family do not live locally. I was contacted by a volunteer, Gillian Baldwin, from WVS in March and she helped me access local support groups to make sure that I had some food. I was feeling quite alone, and therefore was offered the opportunity of a befriending call. Gillian, who helped me initially, has been calling me regularly since March. I really look forward to the call and we talk about all sorts of things. I always feel better having spoken to Gillian.

Have you tried any new hobbies during lockdown?

Yes, I have started to make my own



bread. My dad used to cook and I have been inspired by him. I am trying to follow in his footsteps. Dad likes to grow his own vegetables and produce cheap and cheerful meals. My dad bought me a bread maker for my birthday. I've made dough for pizzas and rolls, and also baked full-size loaves.

What bread maker do you have?

I have a Russell Hobbs bread maker. It's good and you can set it to 'fast bake' and have a loaf in 3 hours. It comes with a measuring spoon and cup and the instructions clearly tell you how much of each ingredient the various recipes require. It's easy, as you just fill the cup or the spoon and you do not need scales.

Thank you for sharing your story with us. You have overcome significant challenges and really have a zest for life which is inspiring.

Good luck with the bread making!



IT Bits & Bytes

Amazon Echo Dot Trial by Ruth Okey

Some of our registered service users were contacted in the summer about taking part in an Amazon Echo Dot (smart speaker) trial for 6 months. Recipients had to have WiFi, and a smart phone or tablet (their own or a friend or relative's) in order to install it. They were sent the Echo Dot and instructions on how to install the device. Near the end of the trial we will be collecting detailed feedback before re-distributing the devices for a further trial.

What to ask Alexa?

During the e-mail correspondence for the trial it was discovered that one of our service users, Robin Christopherson MBE, produces a daily podcast called Dot to Dot. Each episode is 5 minutes long and he reviews a different Alexa skill (apps for Alexa) each day. So why not ask "Alexa play Dot to Dot podcast" or visit www.usa2day.podbean.com to check out previous episodes and see what fun you and Alexa can have.

Alexa skills include quizzes, games, workouts, meditation, book reviews, radio and so much more!

I received the Dot and my son helped me set it up. It's brilliant, a fantastic time saver, it's really useful and it stops me having to struggle to read playlists and apps on my phone.

Thank you so much, this is a godsend for visually impaired folk. John.

Jim says 'it's amazing, it's so much easier to use than my phone'

A friend has installed Alexa for me and 'she' is working fine. I still have quite a lot to learn and experimenting usually brings satisfaction. Ethel

If you are registered blind or partially sighted and would like to be contacted for similar trials in the future, please make sure that we have your up-to-date e-mail address on our database.

If you want to discuss smart speakers or have help with other IT issues, please call 01926 411331

Super Saving - Grants

by Kate Perkins



Advances in technology have helped many of our service users with sight loss, so it was no surprise when I was asked to apply for an IT grant to help one of our younger service users, Paul Proctor who has recently lost his sight. Having become sight impaired quickly, Paul craved more independence and felt that an iPad would help him to achieve this.

I approached Barchester's Charitable Foundation, a registered charity that helps older people as well as other adults with a disability throughout the UK. They particularly support applications that combat loneliness and enable people to engage with their community and the wider world. Paul was an ideal candidate, as his world had shrunk overnight and he was increasingly reliant upon other people. It was a 6 week wait to see if our application was successful, which thankfully it was!

Obviously seeing a screen is only one way to experience an iPad, but with voice activation it has meant that Paul can navigate the iPad without assistance. Once our Support Centres are back up and running Paul is hoping to have an appointment with Ruth, our IT Support Officer, to be shown other functions that the iPad can offer him.

I spoke with Paul approximately 6 weeks after he received his iPad. He said it had made a huge difference to his life. As he is severely sight impaired it has helped massively with his independence, he is able to communicate by e-mail more easily, listen to the news and talking newspapers as well as listen to films and music without having to ask for help or assistance.

Another big bonus for Paul is that he has been able to participate on Zoom calls and join in discussion forums, which he would not have been able to do previously. Now with his new-gained confidence using the iPad, he is hoping to explore RNIB's talking books and discover the world of audio books.

We are hugely grateful to the charities that offer these grants that enable us support our service users and make such a difference for them.



Recipe

Pasta Pronto Pesto Salmon Italiano

by Andrew Baker

A delicious pesto salmon with pasta and mediterranean vegetables made in minutes with a microwave. Bring a little summer warmth to a winter's day.

Equipment

- A microwave oven
- Oven gloves
- Microwave cookware or microwave-safe bowl and clingfilm
- Measuring cup

Ingredients

- 125g fillet of salmon
- A generous teaspoon of pesto
- 1 cup dried pasta (any type)
- 1 cup frozen roasted mediterranean vegetables
- Water to cover pasta
- Salt

Method based on a 900W (category E) microwave (adjust cooking times for different power levels)

1. Place the salmon skin-side down into a microwave dish
2. Spread the pesto on top of the salmon fillet

3. Cover and cook salmon for 2 minutes on high. Then set aside
4. Put the pasta into a microwave saucepan and cover with water and pinch of salt
5. Cook uncovered for 5 minutes on high, stir pasta
6. Add the frozen mediterranean vegetables to the pasta then return to microwave and cook for a further 5 minutes
7. Remove from microwave and drain. Stir vegetables into the pasta
8. Remove the skin from the salmon and break into flakes
9. Serve the pasta and vegetables, placing the flaked salmon top.

Then enjoy.

Top Tips and Alternatives

- Have everything ready, close to your microwave, before you start cooking
- Do you have a bump-on to mark the timer button or dial?
- Measuring cups are easy to use and are quicker than weighing things. I use them all the time



- Use an oven glove to handle the cookware as it can get quite hot
- Use microwave cookware when you can. The small saucepan I used for this recipe was purchased locally for just £1.99
- A vegetarian alternative - use veggie parmesan cheese and olives.
- If you prefer not to cook pasta, try microwavable rice from the packet
- Substitute the mediterranean vegetables with frozen garden vegetables
- No salmon? No problem. Just add a no-drain tin of tuna to the cooked pasta and vegetables.

I love this recipe, a complete meal that can be enjoyed hot or cold. If eating cold, drizzle a little olive oil over the pasta first. It looks great with the pink of the salmon and tastes lovely with the mediterranean vegetables.

Using the microwave, it can all be cooked on the counter top with no need to carry heavy pans or have the hob on.

Please give it a go and let us know how you get on.

Volunteer Focus

Going the Extra Mile

by Del Hobden

During this pandemic we have had fantastic support from our volunteers.

Club volunteers, home visitors as well as support centre volunteers, have been phoning their members or service users on a regular basis since March, and continue to do so. For these service users, having that continued link with their 'normal life' has been a much-needed lifeline.

We have also been fortunate to have a group of new volunteers who wanted to contribute during these difficult times and agreed to support us. Some because they were furloughed and felt frustrated at not being able to work and wanted to give their time to support those less fortunate, others wanted to use their spare time to help relieve the loneliness that the pandemic has inevitably caused. This has enabled WVS to support over 300 service users with our telephone befriending

service. We now have over 120 volunteers supporting our telephone befriending service.

Many of these new volunteers have decided to continue as volunteers for WVS since returning to work – some are given the time to make the phone call during work time by their employers, others fit the phone calls into their lunch-break, whilst yet more make the call when they get home.

The enthusiasm to continue volunteering has been heart-warming and a credit to the people who give their time to volunteer.

We continue to search for willing volunteers, so if you have a friend, colleague or family member who has an hour a week to spare to chat on the phone and support WVS to reduce isolation please pass on our telephone number.

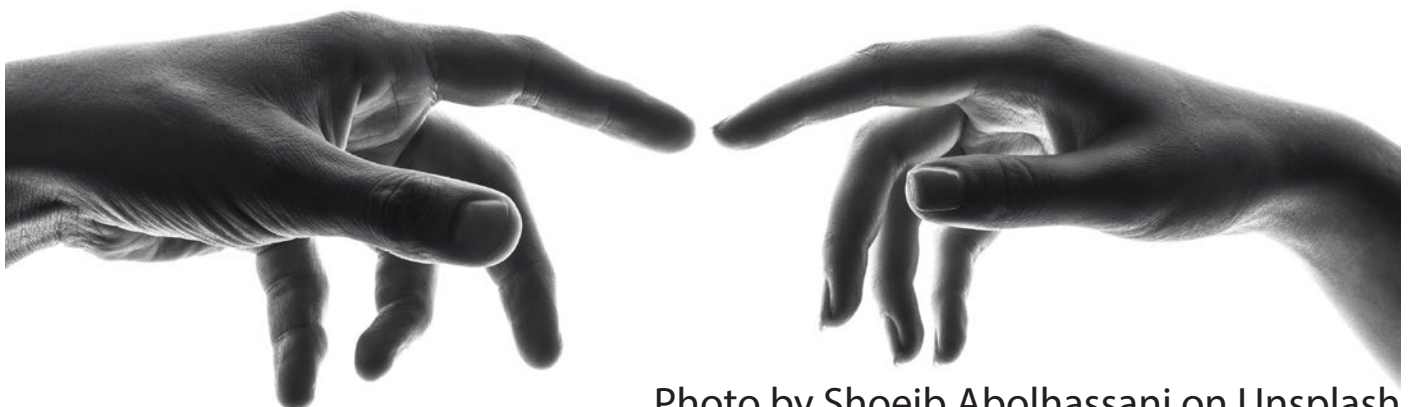


Photo by Shoeib Abolhassani on Unsplash

Sixth Form Volunteers showcase WVS



KING EDWARD VI SCHOOL
SHAKESPEARE'S SCHOOL

In February, Louise Jelley worked alongside student volunteers from the King Edward VI School in Stratford-upon-Avon, to produce a promotional video for Warwickshire Vision Support. Sixth Form students carried out video interviews at our support centres in Stratford and Nuneaton, capturing individual accounts of living with sight loss and overcoming challenges.

Collectively, the students created a promotional video showcasing our support centres and the services we offer including IT Training and equipment demonstrations. This video is available on our website, together with a few of the filmed personal interviews.

The students also produced a video to promote volunteering opportunities and encourage engagement.

We would like to say thank you to Louie, Nabilah, Sean and Ani for their enthusiasm and dedication to making these video productions and thank King Edward VI School for allowing their students to take part in this volunteering partnership.

We would also like to thank all of the service users who agreed to be filmed. Some of the material has yet to be used, but we would not have been able to create these productions without you.

Sad Farewell

I am very sorry to have to report that Harjeet Matharu, one of our volunteer coordinators, passed away on Saturday 14 November after a brief battle against cancer.

Harjeet joined the WVS team in June 2019. In just a short period of time, Harjeet became a highly respected and valued member of our staff team and made a major contribution to supporting and developing our volunteers. She will be greatly missed.

The staff, trustees, volunteers and service users at WVS offer our deepest condolences to her family.



Ramble Tag Competition

Warwickshire Vision Support has partnered with the owners of the Ramble Tag to bring you a seasonal competition. The Ramble Tag is a guidance aid, designed specifically to improve the experience of guided walking and sport for visually impaired people. It was invented in April 2018 by Laura Maclean and Tom Forsyth.

Ramble Tag is giving away three of their products to three lucky winners drawn from all the correct entries received by 28 February 2021. To be in with a chance of winning one of these innovative guiding aids, please complete the word search and having found all of the listed entries, you then need to find one word that embodies Warwickshire Vision Support which is not listed. This mystery word has 10 letters.

Once you find the word, you can either write to us telling us what the



word is and your entry will be placed in the draw, you can email enquiries@warwickshire.vision or you can call us on 01926 411331. We will ensure that all correct entries are available to be drawn on 1 March 2021.

For more information about the Ramble Tag, visit their website www.rambletag.co.uk

Congratulations!

We offer our congratulations to Rosie Brady and Tricia Griffiths who were deservedly awarded the British Empire Medal in this year's Queen's Birthday Honours.

Rosie and Tricia started the Coventry Resource Centre in 2010 and have since worked tirelessly to turn it from any empty shell to a vibrant and highly valued hub for the VI community of Coventry.

The centre, based at Earlsdon Avenue South, Earlsdon, Coventry normally attracts about 120 visitors each week.

Ramble Tag Competition

Q Y S S X X J Z P K F J T E F
P C E W A W T E G I F T S N R
T P A K W M E W R A L Y E G I
L E O N R X T E H U L T W A E
W K V Z D U P S C L J S H P N
A E O T E L T S I M Z O J M D
D W U L A S E W I R F R M A S
V L A C L D D S W H H F Y H H
E I E L P O K B Z X P C E C I
N P E R O R E I N D E E R A P
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E M F O T R B K A G E X Y Z R
V W W I P Y I N H L U L O W G
M N Z W Y H N P S U I W S W X

- Advent
- Angels
- Bells
- Candles
- Champagne
- Christmas
- Fireplace
- Frosty
- Gifts
- Goodwill
- Mistletoe
- Noel
- Party
- Reindeer
- Robin
- Snow
- Tinsel
- Turkey

Supporting people living
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:

Warwickshire Vision Support

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Warwick CV34 5LZ

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Website: www.warwickshire.vision

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