

Warwickshire

Vision

Winter 2021



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Acknowledgements

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CEO Opening

As we approach the Christmas and New Year season, I can't help but think that this festive and bumper-sized edition of the magazine reminds me so much of all that's good at this time of the year.

From the Lord Lieutenant's kind message of thanks and congratulations to our wonderful volunteers who received their Queens Award in September (p.6 & p.7.), to volunteer Glenys's £1000 donation of thanks to WVS on behalf of her father Gerry who used to attend the Rugby VSC, this edition celebrates the very best of our community of people, both here in Warwickshire and beyond.

As we all know, the Christmas message is centred on the act of giving and people's generosity of spirit, and what better examples of that could you find than David and Jimbo's wonderful fundraising efforts (p.8) and Councillor Tony Jackson's donation in support of our Telephone Befriending and Home Visiting services (p.30). And what would Christmas be without the giving of gifts, and in that respect, our wonderful new HQ in Warwick is a perfect testament to the very generous gift bequeathed to us by one of our service users in the form of a Legacy in 2020 (p.12).

The festive season is also a time of hope, and with that in mind, I urge you all to read inspirational blind poet David Steele, determined young footballer Mikey Poulli and gifted braille artist Clarke Reynolds' individual stories of courage and hope in our Features Section (p.12-19).

And last but not least, the Christmas message is also about finding a light in amongst the dark and the sharing of comfort and joy with others, and here at Warwickshire Vision Support, that's what we have been striving to do every day for you all through this unexpected, challenging and most unpredictable of years.

So, on behalf of the Trustees, the staff and all of our volunteers, I hope that you find something in this magazine and in the work that we do at WVS that fills you with joy, helps to lift your spirits and offers you some hope for a better future.

With very best wishes and Seasons Greetings



Nik Demetriades

News Round Up

Home Visitor Service

Announcement

Our Home Visitor Service is one of our most valued services. The service helps many people maintain their independence to help them continue their lives to its fullest extent in their homes.

For many people living with sight loss, the greatest challenges are often those associated with isolation and the problems of not being able to access information. Which is why when the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the nation, we had to make the difficult decision to temporarily close the service, to ensure the safety of our staff and the people we support.

As you may be aware, we have been monitoring COVID-19 cases over the last few months in hopes to resume the service, but unfortunately the rates have not dropped to the levels we would have hoped.

In light of this, and to ensure that everyone including service users and volunteers are kept safe, it has been decided that the Home Visiting Service will continue to be suspended and reviewed in the Spring.

We appreciate that this will come as a huge disappointment to both our volunteers and the people we support, but please be assured it is a decision that has not been taken lightly.

To further support those who will be missing our home visitor service, we are still running multiple Vision Support Centres, regular social clubs and our Telephone Befriending Service, these are all free services which everybody is welcome to join, except for the Vision Support Centres where we ask attendees to make a small donation.

For these services, we are able to have greater control over the necessary health and safety precautions, which is why we are able to reopen these.

For more information about these services, please visit www.warwickshire.vision

If you are interested in joining us at any of these services please contact us by calling 01926 411331 or by emailing us at enquires@warwickshire.vision

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service



As you may already be aware, last year we were awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the charity equivalent of an MBE, in recognition of the high-quality service, commitment and dedication to the people we support by our volunteers.

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 that each and every one of us can be proud of.

As part of the celebrations, in 2020, Warwickshire Vision Support was invited to attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace to celebrate with the other winners of the award.

Unfortunately however, the event

was eventually cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Which is why, as lockdown restrictions have now been eased, we were delighted to finally be able to celebrate this fantastic achievement with our volunteers who made it all possible.

On Wednesday 15th September, our volunteers were invited to join us to celebrate at the Warwick Boat Club for the official presentation of the award from Lord Lieutenant Timothy Cox on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen.

We were overjoyed to be able to finally see our volunteers again, a lot of whom we had not been able to see



WVS Chair Liz Thiebe accepting the award from the Lord Lieutenant

in person since before the pandemic, making this a perfect opportunity to coincide the event with the presentation of our Volunteer Excellence Awards, our awards for volunteers that were announced during National Volunteering Week earlier in the year.

Taking place on a beautifully sunny afternoon, volunteers were welcomed with food, drinks and live music to commemorate the celebration before the Queen's Award was officially presented.

Also joining us in celebrating the occasion, were special guests, the Lord Lieutenant, the Deputy Lieutenant, the Mayor of Warwick, the Mayor of Kenilworth, the Warwickshire County Councillor, the County Council Chair, the Warwickshire Commissioner for Health and the High Sheriff of Warwickshire.

After a while of catching up and mingling, The Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire began the ceremony, joined with representatives from



WVS Chair and Special Guests



Floral arrangements for the raffle

the Royal Navy, Air Force and Army cadets to present the award.

After speeches from the Lord Lieutenant and WVS trustees, we then turned our attention to the Volunteer Excellence Awards.

The Volunteer Excellence Awards were made to celebrate the amazing work that our volunteers do and the contribution that they have made to improving the lives of others.

Sheila Richards, Elaine Ball, Shirley Pilkington, Ruth Dutton and Ruth Beesley, the winners of the 2021 Volunteer Excellence Awards, have a combined total of over 80 years of service to WVS and were finally able to receive their awards after being awarded them earlier in the summer.

Following the presentation of the awards, the afternoon was rounded off with slices of cake and a raffle of a range of floral arrangements.

Thank you to everybody that was able to attend, and a thank you again to all of our volunteers whose hard work and dedication made all of this possible.

David and Jimbo's Everest Challenge

Earlier in the year, WVS Trustee David Adams set himself an incredible challenge. He and his beloved guide dog Jimbo were to walk the equivalent of the height of Mount Everest, all in time for David's 78th birthday, in order to raise money for Warwickshire Vision Support, European Guide Dogs and the Motor Neurone Disease Association.

Reflecting on his decision to try and conquer such an impressive distance, David shared, "As with the majority of the country, we have been in hibernation quite a few months, which hasn't been great for the belly... now that lockdown is coming to an end, I have decided to lose a few pounds, but also raise a few whilst I'm at it!"

To achieve this feat, David and Jimbo calculated that they would need to climb Marston Hill, a very large nearby hill with a steep 14 degree slope, a total of 197 times to reach the equivalent of the world's highest peak.

Having made their first climb on Monday 1st March, Jimbo and David had to climb Marston Hill every single day (and twice on Saturday and Sundays) to finish on David's birthday on the 8th August.



David and Jimbo sat at a bench

News of David and Jimbo's extraordinary challenge quickly gathered a lot of attention, and was even picked up by news broadcasters such as ITV news.

To celebrate David and Jimbo's final trek up Marston Hill, on David's birthday, friends, family and members of the local community gathered at the top of the hill in a celebration with food and live music to welcome David and Jimbo as they reached the hill's peak.

After months of slogging back and forth across one of Warwickshire's most gruelling hills, David and Jimbo managed to raise almost **£10,000** for Warwickshire Vision Support, European Guide Dogs and the Motor Neurone Disease Association - an incredible achievement!

Learning Braille Online

You may remember that earlier in the year, we published a story about Mel Pritchard, a member of our Board of Trustees, who had been spending time working with the Brailist's Foundation to deliver a series of braille classes online during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mel, who was born with a severe visual impairment, had been using braille all of her life. Pre COVID-19, Mel had been teaching students braille in 1-to-1 classes and small groups for over 20 years.

During lockdown, Mel was approached by the Brailist's Foundation to start delivering braille for beginners' sessions online to visually impaired people.

Due to the physical nature of reading braille and the level of detail and support needed to teach it, the thought of delivering lessons on a virtual platform could be considered too laborious and too challenging a task by many.

Mel, however, is no stranger to using technology. When Mel initially joined WVS in 2013, she then went on to set up the Warwickshire Vision Support IT project which has since helped many blind and visually impaired people across the county.

Mel's braille courses ended up being a massive success, so much so, that



Mel and her guide dog Vector

the Brailist's foundation asked her to re-join with them again in delivering free beginner's braille classes online.

Taking place online on Tuesdays at 6pm from the 11th January 2022, this course will introduce attendees to Grade 1 braille. By the end of the course, attendees will be able to:

- Understand when and where braille will be useful to you
- Read short stories in braille
- Use braille for labelling around the home
- Use braille technology, either stand-alone or to extend the functionality of your computer, smartphone or tablet

For more information and details on how to register, please visit:

<https://www.brailists.org/beginners/>

Vision Support Centres

- Full Timetable

We are delighted to inform you that after a successful trial run, **ALL** of our vision support centres have fully resumed and are back and available to the public.

Please drop in and visit one of our Vision Support Centres on one of the following days for face-to-face advice and information, equipment demonstrations, service requests and IT training – we'd be delighted to welcome you back.

Whilst every care has been taken to ensure our centres are COVID safe, please note that your attendance will be at your own risk. You will be asked to register and have your temperature taken on arrival, and we ask that you please wear a mask until seated by our team.

Please note: All of our centres will follow this timetable indefinitely, except on bank holidays and between 20th December and 4th January.

Weekly Centres

Area	Location	Date	Time
Leamington	(as of 10 th Jan 2022) Chandos Court, Chandos Street, CV32 4YU	Every Monday	9:30 - 11:30am
Nuneaton	Newtown Community Centre, Newtown Road, CV11 4HG	Every Thursday	9:30 - 11:30am
Rugby	Rugby Baptist Church, Regent Place, CV21 2PJ	Every Wednesday	9:30 - 11:30am
Stratford-Upon-Avon	Stratford Samaritans Community Hub - Tyler House, Tyler Street, CV37 6TY	Every Tuesday	9:30 - 11:30am

Monthly Centres

Area	Location	Date	Time
Alcester	Malt Mill Lane Community Centre, Malt Mill Lane, B49 5QR	Every 3 rd Tuesday of the Month	1:30 - 3:30pm
Atherstone	St Mary's Church Hall, The Market Place, Sheepy Road, CV9 1EX	Every 3 rd Friday of the Month	9:30 - 11:30am
Bedworth	Bedworth Ex-Servicemans Social Club, Rye Piece Ringway, CV12 8JH.	Every 1 st Friday of the Month	9:30 - 11:30am
Coleshill	Coleshill Community Centre, Temple Way, B46 1HH	Every 2 nd Thursday of the Month	2:30 - 4:30pm
Kenilworth	Kenilworth Senior Citizens Club, Abbey End, Kenilworth, CV8 1QJ	Every 2 nd Friday of the Month	9:30 - 11:30am
Shipston-on-Stour	Stour Court, Old Road, CV36, 4HE	Every 4 th Tuesday of the Month	2:30 - 4:30pm
Southam	Graham Adams Centre, St James Road, Southam, CV47 0LY	Every 1 st Tuesday of the Month	2:00 - 4:00pm

WVS: A New Era

The times are-a changing at Warwickshire Vision Support. In our last edition, we announced that we would hopefully soon be moving to a larger, new home situated somewhere close to Warwick's town centre.

We are delighted to finally be able to announce that we have successfully completed our move, and we are now located right in the midst of Warwick's town square, at 14 Market Place.

The aim of this move was to locate to a new and suitable location that would be more accessible to the people we support, all whilst being somewhere that offered a larger space that could be effectively utilised in the future to pave the way for potential group activities and one-on-one sessions.

Providing the best possible service to the people we support has always been at the heart of everything we do, and this move is the first step of many in creating a much more holistic and central hub of support for those who need it.

Our new building will make it a lot easier for people who are using public transport as there are many public transport links across the county to Warwick's town centre.



WVS staff outside our new HQ

In addition, the sheer size of our new building opens the doors for countless opportunities in ways in which we can help support people.

We are currently meeting with various stakeholders and working groups to discuss how we can best take advantage of this new space to effectively renovate the building to make it the best possible space it can be.

While we are still at the beginning of this journey, we cannot wait until it's ready for you to join us, in what will hopefully be the dawning of a new age of care at Warwickshire Vision Support.

You can find us at our new home: 14 Market Place, Warwick, CV34 4SL. Please be aware that our telephone and email contact details have remained the same.

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Features

Poetry in Motion

by Vicky Sartain

If you've ever struggled trying to make yourself understood by those with perfect vision, Dave Steele aka The Blind Poet, is a lyrical master, giving hope to people in the darkest times with his beautiful way with words

When Dave Steele first learned the name of the condition, retinitis pigmentosa (RP), he was just seven years old. His sister was the first in the family to be diagnosed in the early 80s but in those days not a lot was known about it – other than that there was no treatment or cure. Dave explained: "She was advised, very matter-of-factly, not to have children because it was hereditary. After that I remember getting tested at an eye hospital in Manchester but was told it probably wouldn't affect me until I was much older, and so life continued as normal."

At 18, Dave left college and became a cabaret singer working at Pontins holiday parks and on cruise ships, and during that time he was starting to experience early symptoms of RP known as night blindness: struggling to see when going from a brightly lit room or from sunshine into darkness/low light and vice versa. He said: "It would take someone with normal



Dave Steele

vision a couple of seconds to adjust but took me far longer. It still didn't worry me too much as I was fine otherwise, but in my late 30s I went for a routine eye test and things changed dramatically.

"I was already going through big life changes, having recently ended a relationship with my daughter's mum, then moving from Glasgow back to my hometown of Manchester for a fresh start. I'd met someone new who is now my wife, and we had a son in 2013. We'd set a date to get married on New Year's Eve in 2014 but the eye test in April of that year sent our plans spiralling. I was told I

had a lot of pigment in my eyes and that I needed to stop driving immediately, and was referred to a retinal specialist. A week later I was diagnosed as severely sight impaired, or legally blind. I told my employer the news – I was working in car sales at the time as well as singing – and they let me go because I couldn't do test drives anymore, so all of a sudden I was out of work. I could no longer do my gigs either because I couldn't drive. I tried to get financial support but there was a nine-month waiting list."

Dave admits that was probably one of the toughest times of his life, and he suffered with anxiety and depression not only for the vision loss but the financial pressure his family was under. He said: "We lost our house, had to feed our kids on food parcels for a while, and were really struggling to get any support. We turned a corner when my sister said that the best way I could try to come to terms with it would be to speak to people going through similar problems and join support groups online. Doing that was a big help, and I decided to attend a group in person. When the organisers heard that I was a singer they asked me to perform, and I agreed just to take my mind off how nervous I was about going, and the reality of accepting that this was now my life. At that time I had lost all my peripheral vision, so it was pretty much like looking through a straw."

"The night before, I was deciding the songlist and had the idea of singing a well-known song and changing the words. So I chose 'Stand by me' by Ben E. King and rewrote it with lyrics that described what I was experiencing. When I performed it, people were crying and some came up to me afterwards to shake my hand and say how much it had resonated with them. All of a sudden I felt I had a purpose again – so I just started to write poetry every day and that's how it all started. I had a eureka moment that was like a switch being flicked and poetry started pouring out of me!"

"I started posting poetry to the online support groups and each time people would message me from all over the world saying how much it helped, and that they were using my words to explain to their loved ones how they were feeling. That was a massive thing for me; it spurred me on to do more. So I decided to write about everything, good and bad. It's been therapeutic – I sometimes reread poems when I'm having a tough time to remind myself of how far I've come – but I get the most satisfaction from knowing I'm helping others.

The experience of sight loss is terrifying for many reasons: loss of independence, pride, confidence, and for me it was not knowing where my place was in the world anymore. It felt like doors were closing all around me in the early stages of the RP when

no-one wanted to hire me. It seemed like a fight for survival.”

“Ironically, the way things are now, RP is probably the best thing that’s ever happened to me! I’m grateful for this challenge because it’s allowed me to do incredible things that I never could’ve dreamed of. Before I lost my sight, I used to think I was going down the wrong path in life: things used to always go wrong and I used to feel I was hitting my head against a brick wall, but after losing my sight and writing poetry, everything seemed to come together. I probably notice and ‘see’ more in the world now that I have limited sight.”

After regularly posting poems to the online community, it was suggested Dave set up a Facebook page. He explained: “Some of my ‘followers’ started a Go Fund Me campaign so I could self-publish my first book of poems, and in February 2016, during RP Awareness Month, I released my first book, ‘Stand by Me RP’ on Amazon. In its first week it got to number one in the European poetry release in both America and Australia.

Dave went on to write two other books in the ‘Stand by Me RP’ series, and such was its success that he was invited to the USA by The Low Vision Shop, who managed his first book tour in 2019 and helped him launch The Blind Poet brand, which has since led to further opportunities.

To date, eight years after his

diagnosis, Dave has written more than 800 poems and three books [number ones in the US]. He said: “I’m inspired by all sorts of things that trigger emotions, and I’ve never spent more than 20 minutes writing a piece. Every time [Dave uses his phone recorder to capture his thoughts] it’s like someone’s telling me what to write – words just come. One of my favourites that I regularly read at events is ‘My Blind Secret’, which addresses the judgment of others towards a disability they may not perceive to be that serious. Often people consider that ‘you don’t look blind’, which among other things can put someone off from applying for support.”

Next up is a new children’s book called ‘Austin’s Amazing Adventures’, inspired by his son who has a 50 per cent chance of going blind in later life. Dave said: “I want the series to focus on normalising different challenges that kids face, and to get the books into schools for everyone to read.” In between writing and guest speaking at events, Dave will soon resume his travels to reach new audiences and continue to offer words of relief, hope and happiness.

For more information about Dave Steele, visit www.theblindpoet.net

Artificial Vision - Seeing Again

With technology always improving, you never quite know what's around the corner!

Recently published in the scientific journal "Clinical Investigation", Spanish researchers collaborated with American and Dutch neuroscientists to create a new brain implant device to help assist in tackling blindness.

Within their studies, the group of researchers were able to help a 58-year-old woman see shapes and letters after being completely blind for 16 years.

Coupling the new brain implant technology and video camera eyeglasses, scientists used what are called microelectrode arrays to create an artificial vision which then helped the woman identify several letters and shapes.

They achieved this by performing a sequence of tests using penetrating electrodes which could create visions of shapes.

The brain implant, which is approximately the size of a penny works by bypassing the optic nerve and instead provides stimulation to the brain's visual cortex. The research also found that the implant did not cause any harm to the woman or create any negative side effects.



Close up picture of an eye

"One goal of this research is to give a blind person more mobility," said Professor R. A. Normann, co-author on the study. "It could allow them to identify a person, doorways, or cars. It could increase independence and safety. That's what we're working toward."

Study author Professor Eduardo Fernández, from the University Miguel Hernández, said: "These results are very exciting because they demonstrate both safety and efficacy and could help to achieve a long-held dream of many scientists, which is the transfer of information from the outside world directly to the visual cortex of blind individuals, thereby restoring a rudimentary form of sight."

While the study is still in its early stages, the results of this study could hopefully lead to some exciting things in the nearby future.

Never Give Up: Mikey's journey

11-year-old Mikey Poulli has always been a huge footballing fan, he grew up loving football, playing and watching it at every opportunity he got.

He enjoyed attending Arsenal games, watching and cheering on his footballing heroes at the Emirates stadium whenever he could, and more than anything, Mikey always wanted to one day become a professional footballer.

He spent a few years playing for his local club from the age of 5 years old until he was around 6 and a half years old, when his whole world was suddenly turned on its head.

Mikey's parents had taken him for a routine eye test where he was unexpectedly diagnosed with Rod Cone Dystrophy, a rare and incurable eye disease that in most cases eventually lead to blindness.

Doctors at the time were unsure how much vision Mikey could potentially lose or how long it would take, but sadly Mikey lost all his vision within around a year and a half of his diagnosis when he was around 7 years old.

Doctors could not believe how quickly Mikey lost all his vision from



Mikey at the Emirates Stadium

being near perfectly sighted. His parents tried everything they could to help save his sight, even trying safe alternative treatments such as acupuncture which consisted of needles being placed in and around Mikey's eyes and body on a weekly basis, but unfortunately nothing could stop the devastating disease.

Mikey started the football season in 2016 very well sighted, but by the end of that season had to stop playing at his local club as his vision had deteriorated to the extent that he was officially legally blind and therefore it was too dangerous for him and the other children for Mikey

to carry on.

Mikey was devastated, not mainly because of his vision loss, but because of not being able to carry on playing football at his club. However, Mikey was determined that he would still make it as a footballer, and would still tell his parents of his dream of becoming a professional footballer one day. Mikey was just simply not ready to give up his dream of playing football and would still play with his father John, and brother Angelo at every given opportunity.

Soon after his vision loss his parents found a visually impaired football session at the Tottenham Hotspur Centre of Excellence where specialist coaches would carry out sessions for disabled children. In Mikey's first session, a football coach noticed Mikey's natural ability, and informed the F.A. (Footballing Association) straight away who sent scouts to monitor him in training.

Within a few weeks Mikey received confirmation of FA funding for 1 to 1 specialist coaching with the potential of playing internationally for England one day.

Since then videos of Mikey playing football have gone viral on social media sites, branding him a 'Phenomenon' and the 'Daredevil of Football', with Mikey being asked to feature on multiple TV interviews and appearances in the UK and abroad.

Mikey's story also gathered a lot of attention from the footballing community. Just last year, Mikey was personally gifted a pair of OrCam glasses (a smart camera device that uses artificial vision to assist people in becoming more aware of their surroundings) by footballing superstar Lionel Messi.

In addition, Mikey has now been able to meet some of his sporting heroes too. He has now met professional boxer Anthony Joshua, England footballing stars Trent Alexander-Arnold and Jadon Sancho, ex-Arsenal and Germany midfielder Mesut Özil, ex-Arsenal defender Sokratis, Arsenal striker Alexander Lacazette, and with the help of the BBC, he recently received a personal message from Arsenal striker and captain Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang.

Mikey to this day continues to train with England weekly and is currently thriving in developing his football ability.

Make sure you remember the name Mikey Poulli - you might be hearing it a lot in the future!

You can follow Mikey's story on his website and on his various social media accounts:

Website: www.mikeypoulli.com

Facebook: @mikeypoullis

Instagram: @mikeypoulli

Twitter: @mikeypoulli

Seeing without Seeing

The world of art has never been limited to just those who are sighted.

Clarke Reynolds, a severely sight impaired artist living in Portsmouth, has been creating art specifically with visually impaired people in mind, focusing on the use of braille as an artistic medium.

Clarke lives with retinas pigmentosa, he was born with limited sight in his right eye, but that has never deterred him from creating his artwork. Unfortunately, due to kidney problems, Clarke had to leave school early, however he managed to fight back and was accepted to study art at a higher level before gaining a BA honour's degree in model making.

Reflecting upon his artwork, Clarke stated that "My art has changed a lot as my sight decreases, but one thing has always stayed the same – the use of dots in my work. I always say to people that I see through a thousand dots now, and the dots mean something as I've discovered braille. Words are vitally important to a visually impaired person as they describe what we see, and as braille is a tactile language, it helps people with low vision to read and communicate. I use this form of writing in my artwork trying to push the boundaries of what braille was intended for, using the English

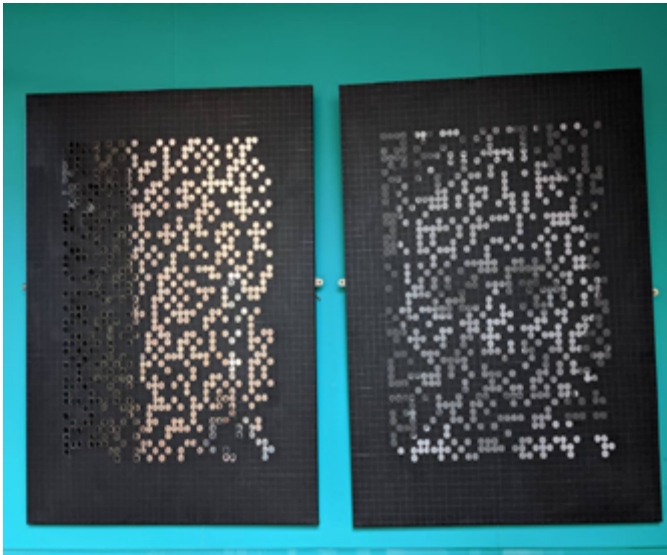


Clarke Reynolds

language and how we say words and their descriptive power by using the dots as a vessel to bring that world to life through braille. My hope is to highlight visual impairment through my artistic language and the ultimate aim of my art is to highlight the importance of braille to visually impaired people, and therefore to society in general"

What makes Clarke's art so unique is that not only is it visible to the naked eye, but people are encouraged to touch it to really get a feeling of the art as well.

The way Clarke creates his art with visually impaired people in mind, is by using a soundscape to help inspire and accommodate different pieces of tactile instalments to his work so that those with visual impairments can 'see' the visual art through sound and touch.



Clarke's braille self-portrait and mirror poem



Clarke's braille piece titled "XENAGOGUE"



Clarke's braille piece titled "Essential Food Shopping"

Clarke uses textiles that he feels have an emotional response to the sounds, that links in together to create a multi-sensory piece. Clarke explains that his goal is to get visually impaired people of all ages to engage in art, regardless of sight loss.

He also uses his art to try and get

people who are sighted to look at the art without actually seeing it, so they can experience how Clarke sees the world.

To emphasize this point, Clarke uses the phrase "Seeing without seeing" as a tagline to aptly describe his artwork. In his own words, Clarke states "Seeing without seeing is a tagline that describes my art. Not only can you see the art but you can touch it as well making it accessible to visually impaired people. Inspired by the sounds around us including the English language and how we communicate through words".

Visit seeingwithoutseeing.com for more information on Clarke's upcoming shows, exhibitions and images of past projects, as well as information about his artistic journey from dream to realisation.

Focus on Health

Getting Active at Home

Did you know that blind and partially sighted people are twice as likely to be inactive than people living without sight loss?

While an interesting fact, this probably doesn't come as much of a surprise to some of our readers. Entering the world of exercise can be debilitating, especially when living with a visual impairment. As you already know, having a visual impairment means that you sometimes have to be extra cautious, as there can often be many hurdles and barriers to overcome before a visually impaired person has the same level of accessibility as a fully sighted person.

However, the world of exercise and being active doesn't have to be limited to the great outdoors, there are many resources available to help you get the same results, but from the comfort of your own living room.

Organisations such as British Blind Sport (BBS) are big advocates in making sport and exercise as accessible as possible, and within that, they have created a number of tools to help people with visual impairments exercise at home.

One thing that has been a staple



Woman exercising indoors

in British Blind Sport's efforts to create accessible and safe at home environments for exercise include regular and consistent uploading of audio exercise routines.

Audio exercise routines, for those who aren't already aware, are simply exercise routines that exist purely in audio format. These don't rely on the visual cues that other exercise routines often use, but instead every physical action is described through audio with the goal of it being easy to use for people with visual impairments.

These routines have been specifically created by British Blind Sport themselves to ensure that people are getting the best audio exercise routine experience possible. This includes creating a variety of different exercise routines to suit

people wherever their interests may lie. This includes activities such as Yoga, Pilates, Boxercise and High Intensity Interval Training (otherwise known as HIIT).

Each routine is approximately 30 minutes long, with some sessions led by various fitness organisations to keep the content fresh and ensure a good workout.

British Blind Sport have more than 150 online audio exercise routines to choose from, with more being added every week.

What makes this even more ideal, is that each and every one of these routines are free to the public and easily available online through YouTube.

There are also multiple categories to browse from, so whether you're looking for a gentle workout, strength and weight training or even something suitable for children, BBS have a playlist ready for you.

To access these audio exercise routines and find a workout that works for you, simply visit:
www.youtube.com/c/BritishBlindSportOrgUK

Of course, it's also important to remember that while exercising at home is a viable alternative to outdoor exercise, there are still many opportunities to make exercising outdoors work for you.



A VISIBLE DIFFERENCE THROUGH SPORT

British Blind Sport Logo

British Blind Sport have a plethora of resources available for free on their website, which is all content created to help visually impaired people exercise.

If there's a particular sport that interests you and you would like to learn how to get involved, you can find masses of content on their website around each individual sport, you can find this information at <https://britishblindsport.org.uk/play-sport/links/>

And finally, if you're not too fussed about what sport you would like to get involved with, you can use the BBS activity finder to find sporting activities in your area. To do this, simply visit: <https://britishblindsport.org.uk/activity-finder/>

BBS enables blind and partially sighted people to have the same opportunities as sighted people to access and enjoy sport and recreational activities in the UK. for more information, visit: <https://britishblindsport.org.uk/>

Advice & Guidance

Access to Work Success

by Jane Thorn

Lisa is registered Severely Sight Impaired (SSI) and is a long cane user, and due to her deteriorating sight, she is currently in the process of applying for a Guide Dog.

She travels independently to work in Stratford on Avon, walking to the bus or train.

Not so long ago she began struggling more when accessing the company's computer database and managed to delete information from various files and on the company website without realising.

As she was already in touch with Guide Dogs for the Blind, this came up in conversation and her contact mentioned Access to Work and suggested she apply for a support worker to assist her with using the database and website work.

Lisa already receives some support from Access to Work for special equipment to enable her to overcome her SSI. She has a large screen monitor with adaptive software to enlarge a portion of the screen over the full screen at any one time and has a screen reader as well as a CCTV and handheld magnifiers to help with reading. A fresh application form was sent out to her



Access to Work
Making work possible

to increase this support to include a sighted support worker.

Lisa had not heard of this element of Access to Work before and contacted Warwickshire Vision Support, Rehabilitation Officers for some guidance and support to complete the application.

Lisa completed the form with the assistance of various sample forms the WVS officer emailed her and bearing in mind the guidance from Guide Dogs to complete the application as if she was on her worst day for visual acuity. She then sent it to our Rehabilitation Team on the Thursday for feedback (there was nothing to add by us as she had made a superb application).

The following Monday, a representative from Access to Work rang Lisa to interview her over the phone about her need for sighted support in the office in order to enable her to do her job properly.

She simply repeated what she had written on the form, and told them that she was afraid of losing her

job without their help to fund a support worker for a few hours each week to ensure she didn't cause any more major errors because she just couldn't see to use the company database correctly. I received this from Lisa the next day:

"I'm delighted to report that my application for a support worker to help me at work to overcome my eyesight has been successful. I can now pay £12.50 an hour for 6 hours a week for 52 weeks of the year thanks to the Access to Work scheme."

What is Access to Work?

Access to Work is a government programme aimed at supporting disabled people to take up or remain in work.

The scheme is specifically designed to provide personalised support to people with disabilities who are either:

- in paid employment
- self-employed
- apprentices
- trainees
- supported interns
- doing self-directed work experience
- on Jobcentre Plus promoted work trials
- going to a job interview

In addition, people may apply if they have:

- a job offer letter
- a job start date
- a letter confirming their interview

Access to Work acts as a discretionary grant scheme that helps by providing the necessary



**Department
for Work &
Pensions**

funds for employers to buy the right equipment and services that can allow people who have disabilities get into or stay in work.

It helps people achieve this by helping to pay for things such as taxi fares to your workplace or for support workers to help you in your workplace (including your home if you work there some or all of the time)

For general information on Access to Work and for more information on how to apply, please go to www.gov.uk/access-to-work

IT Bits & Bytes

by Ruth Okey

RNIB Talking Books are now available to listen to via an Alexa enabled device.



The RNIB talking Book skill provides access to over 34,000 Talking Books. Once registered for the RNIB Talking Book service (0303 123 9999) you will need

to use the Alexa app on a smart phone/tablet to enable the Alexa Talking Book Skill and enter your login information. Once configured you say "Alexa Open RNIB Talking Books" and then you can search the library by author, title or keyword and then navigate the book just by asking Alexa. For further information see the RNIB website or call their helpline (0303 123 9999).



Talking Newspaper app

British Wireless for the Blind Fund (BWBF) and The Talking News Federation (TNF)

have joined forces to bring together local Talking Newspapers from across the UK. The Talking Newspaper app is available for both Android and Apple IOS and gives you access to your local talking newspaper, just select

your region and then the local paper of interest. Local papers include: Coventry Talking Newspaper and Rugby Talking Newspaper. Sit back and enjoy!



Speech Radio app

The new Speech Radio app from the British Wireless for the Blind Fund is available for free on Apple IOS

and Android. This voice-controlled app gives users access to more than 10,000 radio stations from around the world. If you don't want to control all of the features and functions within the app with your voice, simply say "speech off". The device's standard VoiceOver/TalkBack functionality will take over to turn off the command.

Visit the BWBF website (blind.org.uk) to download or for more information.

For more information on useful smartphone apps and IT articles visit our website and look under "How we can help" and "IT Training"

If you want help installing apps or using your smart device why not contact us and request an IT appointment at one of the weekly support centres.



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Volunteering Focus

Looking to the Future

by Lauren Hall



Lauren Hall

Over the course of the pandemic, volunteering has not only changed at Warwickshire Vision Support, but it has changed across the voluntary sector nationwide.

According to the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 12.4 million people have so far volunteered during the pandemic, with 4.6 million doing so for the first time. Increases in volunteering are notable amongst younger people, working-age groups and those who identify as ethnic minorities. Also, there has been a huge increase in digital volunteering roles as 92% of voluntary organisations moved their services online in response to lockdown.

This has been reflected in the changes to volunteering seen at WVS – there has been an influx of different types of people joining our volunteer team and, with the launch of the Telephone Befriending service, a lot of our volunteers now give their time in a remote role.

In May 2021, I joined WVS as the new Volunteer Coordinator. Prior to this, I had worked for 3 years in Guildford at

the Watts Gallery – Artists' Village, the rural home and studio of the great Victorian artists George and Mary Watts, managing their team of 250 volunteers. Now that I have settled into my role here and have been able to meet some of you, it is clear that WVS volunteers are already an exceptional team, as demonstrated by the securing of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2020.

My focus now is to build on this achievement and to develop an outstanding volunteer programme that is inspiring for volunteers, in line with best practice, reacts to the changes the pandemic has brought, and supports WVS in delivering its charitable mission. The first step towards this is finding out more about what our volunteers and members think, so this can be reflected in our future planning.

Whilst there will be opportunities over the coming months to share your thoughts, if you have any initial comments you would like to share about being supported by volunteers, or your own experience as a volunteer, please feel free to contact me by emailing lauren.hall@warwickshire.vision or by calling our offices on 01926 411331.

Fundraising Update

by Claire Weaver

Christmas Cards

Thank you to everybody that was able to purchase a pack of our Christmas cards to help support the charity.

This year we had chosen a traditional theme for our Christmas Cards. Our packs of 10 cards are just £3.95 with all proceeds coming back to us to ensure we can continue our vital work. Our cards are being sold across the County.

Outlets that have been selling our cards have included: The Leamington Pump Rooms, UFC Stratford, our Vision Support Centres and Clubs, staff and Trustees.

While it might be a little late at this point to get these from said outlets now, we still have a number of cards in stock. So if you want to get yourself prepared for next Christmas early while supporting WVS, please call us 01926 411331



Our Christmas cards contain an array of winter themed images, including two robins on a snowy postbox, a train next to a station by a Christmas tree on a snowy day, three children outside a home that is covered in Christmas decorations, Father Christmas waving in front of a car carrying presents, and an illustration of a vintage scene of people entering a church on a snowy day.

Christmas Fundraiser

If Christmas cards aren't your thing, just like last year, we have set up an online fundraiser where people can decorate our virtual Christmas wreath with bows and baubles for a small online donation.

Please visit <https://visufund.com/warwickshire-vision-supports-christmas-wreath> for more information



WVS' Virtual Christmas Wreath

Stratford Councillor and ex-Mayor donates to WVS

Warwickshire Vision Support were delighted to have received a £500 donation from Stratford Upon Avon councillor and ex-mayor Tony Jackson as part of his Mayors Good Causes charity fund.

Tony had selected 'People with Disabilities' as one of his chosen good causes and particularly wanted to support organisations that do so much in supporting the residents of Stratford Upon Avon.

This donation was put towards helping support our Telephone Befriending and Home Visitor Services, and also to the new Stratford Vision Support Centre located at the Tyler House Samaritan's Community Hub which offers face-to-face support, advice and information, equipment demonstrations, service requests and IT training to those living with sight loss to the Stratford upon Avon Community.

Reflecting upon the donation, Councillor Tony Jackson said 'It has been great to catch up with the organisations to whom I was able to make a donation to from my Mayor's Good Causes fund and I am really pleased to have had the opportunity to support them financially.

One of my first actions as Mayor was



WVS Fundraising Officer Claire shaking hands with Tony Jackson

to send a recorded message to the Warwickshire Vision presentation event last year and I have regularly kept in touch with their progress during the difficulties of the last 18 months.

I'm really pleased that they are moving into Tyler House and I have an invitation to join one of their member sessions soon."

The Stratford Vision Support Centre has now reopened and is available to the public. Taking place every Thursday from 9:30-11:30am at Stratford Samaritans Community Hub - Tyler House, Tyler Street, CV37 6TY.

Volunteer Glenys raises £1000 in memory of her father

There is a myriad of reasons as to why our volunteers choose to help at WVS. Glenys became involved with WVS and the Rugby VSC via her father, Gerald Spencer (Gerry) who sadly passed away on 5th Nov 2020.

Glenys said that the help and support her father received at the Vision Support Centres and from WVS made such a difference to her him.

Since then, Glenys has raised funds of approximately £1000 in donations for WVS in Gerry's memory - an incredible achievement!

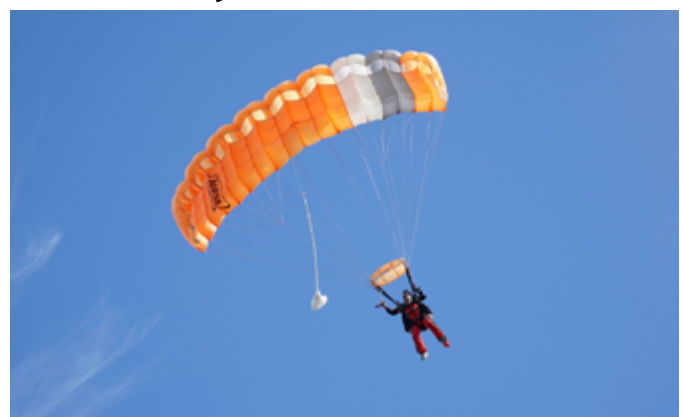


Glenys volunteering at Rugby VSC

Roy and Debbie's Skydive

On 11th March 2022, Roy and his daughter Debbie are undertaking the challenge of a lifetime. They will be jumping out of a plane in aid of their chosen sight loss charities.

Roy, who is 87 years young, will be doing the skydive to raise funds for us. He was registered blind several years ago and regularly attends our Nuneaton Vision Support Centre. He has made some great friends there and Warwickshire Vision's support, resources and advice has been invaluable in supporting him and his family with adjusting to his visual impairment. Debbie will be raising



A picture of a person skydiving

money for Guide Dogs.

If you would like to donate, please contact claire.weaver@warwickshire.vision

Good luck Roy & Debbie!

Supporting people living
with sight loss since 1911



Warwickshire Vision is available
free to people living with sight loss
in Warwickshire. This publication is
available in digital, print and audio
formats.

For more information, please contact:

Warwickshire Vision Support

 01926 411331

E-mail: enquiries@warwickshire.vision

Website: www.warwickshire.vision

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