

IN TOUCH NEWSLETTER: DECEMBER 2022

Welcome to our winter edition of “In Touch”. You will notice that for the first time we have printed in colour. We have been making a few subtle changes at the charity in response to chatting with those we support, and this was one of the requests we received. So here we are, in glorious technicolour!

We also know from talking to you over the last few months that meeting face to face is important and that you want to meet others in the same boat, have fun together and learn from each other. A sense of community and belonging to something means a lot to you all.

In response to this, Southend in Sight now has more social activities on offer than even before the pandemic with coffee mornings, bowling, a choir, talking book club and pub meet ups. Not to mention our Fun Fridays, which Dorothy and Georgie are pictured below enjoying for the first time.



Staff and Trustees have also been looking at what our beneficiaries expect from the charity. Our mission statement is the same – to support local visually impaired people, but we have encapsulated our vision for the future of the charity into five values: excellence, community, empowerment, support and integrity.

In this issue we celebrate the achievements of an awe-inspiring local lady on pages 4 and 5 – a community champion whose work has been recognised by the Queen. Despite what life has thrown at her, she has managed to make a difference to the lives of local and national blind and partially sighted people through her years of campaigning.

Team Talk

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

What a busy year for us here at 117 Hamlet Court Road. It feels like our feet haven't touched the ground. The Centre Team – Coralie and Claire – have talked to and met with more people than ever, supporting them with low vision equipment, advice and information. Our tech and benefits advice, run by volunteers, also continues to be popular. We now have drop-in sessions every Wednesday from 10:30am to 12:30pm for general sight loss advice, with the last Wednesday of the month dedicated to all queries relating to smartphones, tablets and laptops. As always, please call our office on **01702 34 21 31** to book an appointment and for more information on any sight loss related issue.



Our annual exhibition once again proved to be a popular event. The picture right shows our suppliers demonstrating their products to several clients. Over 100 people visited throughout the day, all benefitting from trying out the equipment on offer and from chatting about the help that is available. This is now a firm event in the diary, especially as we know there is nothing like this available in the area, without a trip to London.

Our Talk and Support team also continue with their good work, chatting to over 90 people on a regular basis. When you happen to catch one of our staff members making a call, the overwhelming impression is how positive and cheery the conversations are – with laughter, songs and jokes.

Our congratulations to member of staff Dean for achieving Level 2 on his Counselling Course. We are very proud of Dean (pictured above left on

one of his calls), who is very popular with our Talk and Support clientele. His calm and polite manner and willingness to go the extra mile to help everyone as much as he can, is much appreciated by staff and those he supports in his role. Well done Dean!



You will not have failed to notice our packed social diary – the plan for January to March is printed on a separate yellow flier and enclosed with this newsletter. Georgie is so busy we rarely see her in the office as she moves from coffee mornings to Fun Fridays, to bowling, talking book clubs and of course our newly formed choir. The choir (pictured below in our Centre at one of their practice sessions) has yet to choose a name but their first official

performance will be at our Volunteer's Christmas Celebration in December. We look forward to hearing their voices blended in perfect harmony!



We also welcome a not so new member of staff - Sarah Richardson. Some of you may remember Sarah from Elkington House, as she was the Care Home Manager for over 25 years. Sarah has been supporting us in our charity shop since March on a Wednesday and Saturday, but now she is taking on a new role as Volunteer Coordinator. She will be a great asset to our team.

We always save the best until last - our very hard working Eye Clinic Liaison Officer Tracey! She might not be situated in our main building but she is very much appreciated by us all as she offers support at a time when people need it the most at Southend Hospital Eye Clinic. Tracey continues to “bang the drum” about sight loss awareness around the hospital with staff as well as being a champion for Certificates of Visual Impairment. Way to go Tracey!

Pride of Britain Jill

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

Some of you may have already heard about this year's Pride of Britain Lifetime Achievement Award winner Jill Allen-King, OBE, how she stole the show with her guide dog Jagger and showed dancer Ashley Banjo how to cha-cha-cha on stage!

Jill was honoured for her lifelong dedication to improving the lives of blind and partially sighted people at the televised ceremony a few weeks ago, held at the Grosvenor Hotel in London. She met some very famous people on the red carpet – Carol Vorderman, Mary Berry, Peter Andre and Suzanna Reid, to name a few!

When she is not rubbing shoulders with celebrities, 82 year old Jill lives in Westcliff and has been campaigning for the blind for over 50 years. She was born fully sighted in 1940 but a bout of measles resulted in the removal of one of her eyes as a baby. Aged just 24, on her wedding day, she lost her sight completely because of glaucoma - unrelated to her childhood illness.

Jill spent the next 7 years as a virtual recluse, bringing up her daughter, hardly venturing out. It was the arrival of her first guide dog in 1971 that changed her life. Jill had always been someone who never took no for an answer, but now she was on a mission to make changes for blind and partially sighted people around the country. Her many achievements to date include: introducing tactile paving at pedestrian crossings and train stations, Audio Description for television, announcements on trains and the underground, low level bus buttons for people with disabilities and setting up a resource centre for the RNIB.

When I visited Jill for our interview, her love for her guide dogs over the years and the value she places on the independence her canine friends have awarded her is clear. She can remember the dog she had and where she was when she met some very influential people. In fact, one of her most successful campaigns is ensuring access for guide dogs to accompany their owners – something we take for granted these days.

Jill has met the Queen on numerous occasions – someone whom she looks up to enormously. Like herself, the Queen was a lover of dogs, and the two even shared a link as the Queen owned the sister to one of Jill’s guide dogs Topsy. However, back in 1983 when Jill collected her MBE, her guide dog Brandy was not allowed to accompany her into the ceremony. Jill being Jill, wrote to her friend David Blunkett MP, asking why guide dogs were not allowed into the House of Commons either. The rest as they say, is history!

Jill also recalls meeting the Queen again in the late 1980s when she was volunteering with the RNIB. She demonstrated a talking watch to her Majesty, who was most interested, calling it “fascinating”. And in 2012, Jill was once again honoured, this time with an OBE, meeting Princess Anne to receive her award.

So what is left for the local lady who, even though she stands under five feet tall, has made such a huge difference to blind and partially sighted people? Jill has an ongoing campaign for a lift at her local train station – Chalkwell. She had been working with the late Sir David Amess on this project, but new local MP Anna Firth has now taken up the mantle. I have no doubt that Jill will succeed – she is not a woman who gives up on a cause, as she has proved time and time again over the years.



Before I left, I persuaded Jill to pose for a photograph with her Pride of Britain award, shaped with angel wings and surprisingly heavy. She was quick to show me Jagger’s special award too, presented by Paul O’Grady on the night. The photo left shows Jill with their awards, laughing as Jagger offers his paw.

Jill’s award is very well deserved and we hope that while she does not give up on her campaigning, she does take time to enjoy walks with Jagger in Chalkwell Park and to spend time with her much loved family. Congratulations Jill from us all!

Community Transport

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

When we talk to many of you about maintaining your independence and getting out and about, we are always told that the lack of community transport can make life difficult if you are visually impaired.

We have researched and gathered together some of the local transport options available to you, depending on where you live:

Dial-a-Ride.

This is available to anyone living in Southend. You can use this service if you are registered blind, in receipt of the Higher Rate Attendance Allowance, the Higher Rate Mobility Component of the Disability Living Allowance or the Mobility Supplement of War Pension.

You will need to apply for a membership online or by calling Southend City Council on **01702 90 88 88 (option 3)**. The cost is £12.30 a year. Once this is processed, here is how you make a booking:

- Leave a message with your travel details on the booking line by calling **01702 90 88 88 (option 3)** one week in advance.
- The line is open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 11am.
- The first pick up is 10:15am and the last drop off 2:30pm.
- You can use Dial-a-Ride to take you anywhere in the Southend area (excluding hospital appointments and day centres).
- A return journey up to 4 miles will cost £8.20.
- Care dogs and escorts for visually impaired people travel free of charge.
- Bookings are made on a first come first served basis.
- To cancel a booking please call Vecteo on **01702 90 88 88 (option 3)** before 9am on the day of travel.

Wyvern Community Transport.

This transport service is available to the residents of Rochford District and Castle Point Borough. They have a fleet of minibuses with wheelchair access, as well as a volunteer car scheme available to book.

To register as a member and to make a booking, please call **01268 753513** or **01268 757294**. Lines are open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 2pm. The first pick up is at 8:45am and the last return at 3:45pm.

Membership is free of charge. For journeys up to 3 miles in the minibuses or cars, the cost is £5, with a further 80p per additional mile for the bus and 45p per additional mile for the cars. Carers pay a flat fare of £2.

Members can use the service to travel to hospital and medical appointments, dentist and optician appointments, rehabilitation classes, day centres, sports and leisure facilities, shopping, lunch clubs, church groups and visiting friends and family.

Leigh Community Transport.

Over 60s who are living within the Leigh Town Council boundary can become a member of the Community Transport Group and enjoy outings and theatre trips with door-to-door travel included.

You will be picked up from your front door or communal entrance, taken to the event by minibus and returned home afterwards. You are given a time slot in advance to ensure you are ready. All you pay is your ticket cost for the event, refreshment costs and a contribution towards travel costs.

Please contact Leigh Town Council on **01702 716288** for an application form and for more information on upcoming events.

Hospital Transport.

Transport to an NHS funded appointment at a hospital or clinic can be provided across the whole of Mid and South Essex for eligible patients.

In the majority of occasions, if you require transport to and from hospital this will be booked by your healthcare professional. However, if you cannot make your own way due to your medical condition, you can call the 24-hour booking line on **0808 169 9614**. Your eligibility for the service will be assessed before a booking is made.

Further Help.

Please call us on **01702 34 21 31** for further advice on transport. If we cannot help you directly, we can put you in touch with someone who can.

If you think a large print diary or calendar for 2023 might help with keeping track of your appointments, please call us to order your stationery.

Living well with sight loss

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

Held on the second Thursday of October every year, World Sight Day is an international day of awareness that helps focus attention on the global issue of eye health. Southend in Sight marked the day by joining the Southend Lions Club on a walk around the town's Marks & Spencer store with the local Mayor.

Southend Mayor Kevin Robinson was blindfolded and guided around the Marks & Spencer store with the help of our very own CEO, Lucy Martin, to raise awareness of the challenges faced every day by those living with sight loss. He is pictured below in his blindfold holding a white symbol cane, at the front of the store with his wife Debbie, Southend Lions President Steve Williamson, Deputy Store Manager Rob Pickess and Lucy Martin.



Lucy said: "By participating in this walk, we hope that the Mayor will understand in a small way just how challenging it can be to carry out everyday tasks such as choosing and paying for shopping with a visual impairment. As the local sight loss charity, we are very grateful to the Southend Lions for their continued support of our work and for helping to raise awareness on World Sight Day".

World Sight Day was originally initiated by the Sight First Campaign of Lions Club International Foundation in 2000. Southend Lion Nigel Folkard said: "We are very proud to be part of this annual campaign to highlight the importance of eye health and the challenges faced by people living with sight loss around the world".

Mayor Kevin Robinson concluded: “I would like to thank Southend in Sight for the opportunity on World Sight Day to experience shopping with a guide. This showed how an everyday activity can be complicated. There is a sense of disconcerting reality which people who are blind or partially sighted have to manage every day.”

Lucy was most impressed by the staff who had received in house training on meeting and greeting customers with extra needs at the Marks and Spencer store. Here at Southend in Sight, we offer sight loss awareness training to local groups and businesses, enabling people to feel more confident in approaching visually impaired people when they are out and about in the community.

As well as getting out into the community to spread the word about what we do, we are also very pleased to open up our Centre again for drop-in sessions every Wednesday from 10:30am to 12:30pm for general sight loss advice with volunteers Jackie and Clare. The pair are pictured below at a session in our Centre with tea and biscuits!



Both volunteers have a visual impairment and between them know a great deal about navigating sight loss. They are happy to help anyone who drops in to see them, and chat to others about their experiences, offering advice and information where they can. There is no need to book an appointment, you can just turn up.

On the last Wednesday of every month, the drop-in session covers all things technical – smart phones, tablets, and laptops – with volunteers Steve and Paul.

We are excited to reintroduce this much-needed service and we look forward to welcoming anyone living locally with sight loss for a chat one Wednesday soon.

Bowling Beauties!

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

Our visually impaired ten pin bowling group are known for their competitive spirit and “can do” attitude. With the closure of the National Blind Tenpin Bowling Association earlier this year, the team are now competing in the British Blind Sport Bowling League. And in true style, Andrew Spendley and Clare McLewin, have managed to reach the finals of the “Summer Doubles” competition.



The duo has named themselves “The Misfits”, with the pair becoming firm friends at the bowling alley. They are pictured left at one of their bowling sessions smiling for the camera, with trophy in hand! On being asked about his achievement, Andrew says, “I have been bowling with Southend in Sight for over 10 years now and I particularly enjoy the social aspect of meeting up each week with others like myself who are living with sight loss. The bowling gets me out of the house and has improved my independence, as I take

public transport to get to the bowling alley in Hockley. It also means I am actively exercising and I happen to enjoy myself while I am there!”

Andrew goes on to say, “I have optic neuropathy, which means that everything is out of focus. I just throw the ball at the big white blobs at the end of the lane and hope for the best! Sighted volunteers tell me which pins are left and I have adapted my game over the years. It is exciting when you achieve a good score, and I feel a sense of pride when I win a competition. But mostly I value the support I receive from others in the same boat as me”.

Our visually impaired bowling group meet Thursday mornings (term time only) at CJs Bowling Alley, Eldon Way, Hockley. We welcome new bowlers of all abilities. We have a fun social group but you can also enter into the league if you wish. For more information about joining the bowling team, please call Anne Morris (the Captain!) on **01702 34 21 31**.

Remembering Dot

Written by Lucy Martin, CEO.

We were saddened to hear of the passing of Dot Bambury in August of this year. Dot was a long-standing volunteer and supporter of the charity from the early years, and is remembered fondly by former and current staff and volunteers.

From our records Dot started to volunteer for Southend Blind Welfare Organisation in 1996. She was instrumental in setting up Southend Hospital Eye Clinic's Information Desk with her friend Betty Mayhew, paving the way for us in later years to introduce an Eye Clinic Liaison Officer.

Dot was also known to be active in the early days of fundraising for the charity, giving talks to local groups and inspiring people to get involved with us.



Dot retired from active volunteering in 2014 but continued to support the charity. During her volunteering, she won a number of awards, and is pictured left receiving a commemorative plate. Dot's awards include:

- National Volunteering Award 2005.
- CSV Volunteer of the Year Award in 2006.
- Hospital Honour's Award from Southend Hospital in 2007.
- Diamond Jubilee Community Champion in 2012.

Dot also received long service awards from Southend Blind Welfare Organisation and the archives and photos show that Dot helped with charity walks, rambling, social clubs, outings, holidays, raffles and events.

She was extremely dedicated in helping local blind people and was still very active after her retirement. Dot gave up hours and hours of her time and she will always be part of the history of the charity.

Southend in Sight – your local sight loss charity.

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