



IN TOUCH

Spring Edition: June 2022

Welcome to our summer edition of “In Touch”. We did hope to not mention the “C” word again, but alas, COVID struck several members of staff down (in some cases twice or even three times) over Easter, and we had no choice but to cancel appointments and events and to close our charity shop again.

We are pleased to report that a normal service has now been resumed and we would like to thank our wonderful trustees and volunteers for their support in helping to plug the gaps when staff were unable to work. We have even managed a pub lunch – our first of 2022. The beaming smiles of Lee and Douglas, pictured right, say it all – it’s great to be back together again.



This theme of team work and togetherness is one which we shall touch on again throughout this newsletter. Not only do our staff work well as a team, sharing ideas and workload, but also our volunteers support us as part of the larger team that helps keep our services running.

In turn we are partners with the 3 other sight loss charities in Essex as part of Essex Vision, and we work closely with other local charities and local providers to help provide the best care and support for the visually impaired community.

We feel very fortunate as a small local charity to be surrounded by so many positive people who are so supportive of the work we do – long may that continue!

Team Work

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

Our Sight Loss Centre has been busy with face to face appointments since our last issue. There is still a waiting list but Sight Loss Advisor Coralie and her assistant Claire have been keeping in touch with everyone and dealing with some queries over the telephone.

They have also gradually introduced the Sight Loss M.O.T assessment with clients visiting us for the first time. Our article on pages 4 and 5 goes into detail on what this entails, but so far, the reaction has been very positive. We are sure it will make a difference to everyone using our services.

The team were delighted to receive a donation from Rochford Rotary Club to purchase essential equipment such as partially sighted badges, lanyards, bump-ons and pens. These small items can be given to anyone for free, and is especially useful to those who are at the start of their sight loss journey. Coralie is pictured right with Rochford Rotarian Jerry Davenport, who also happens to be a trustee for Southend in Sight, with some of the items on offer. As always, please call our office on **01702 342131** for sight loss advice and to make an appointment.



Our Talk and Support team are still going strong and have taken on a few more regular calls. We know that their work is appreciated as we receive calls and letters of thanks from the people we support and their families. In fact we carried out a short survey recently with a few of our Talk and Support recipients and were pleased that the feedback was 100% positive. It is good to know that a service that became a lifeline during the pandemic is still relevant and necessary.

Events are very much back in the diary as we approach the summer months and we can move outdoors. Our monthly coffee mornings (pictured right) have become very popular, with over 40 people attending our last one in May. The dates for these and other planned activities are listed on page 10. Please call our office for information on social activities provided by ourselves and other local charities.



Thanks to a grant from Rayleigh Town Council, Community Engagement Officer Georgie will be meeting local businesses, schools and community groups in the Rayleigh area to run sight loss awareness training sessions.

Georgie, pictured right with CEO Lucy, can offer practical advice on meeting, greeting and guiding anyone that is visually impaired. We hope that by offering training to the community, simple actions and small changes can make a big difference to



everyone living locally with sight loss. To book sight loss awareness training in Rayleigh or the Southend area, please call our offices on the usual number.

And last but not least we must pay tribute to the Herculean efforts of our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer Tracey who continues to support local visually impaired people at Southend Hospital. Tracey is available to offer advice to anyone using the Eye Clinic services and is on hand to help with navigating the “C.V.I” process (Certificate of Visual Impairment). You can reach Tracey through our offices, or call her directly on: **01702 435 555 extension 7025**. A team to be proud of indeed!

Sight Loss M.O.T

Written by Coralie West, Sight Loss Advisor.

We first came across the Sight Loss M.O.T at a Visionary conference 3 years ago. Staff were keen to introduce this new tool to ensure that when people came to us for advice, we had covered all aspects of their life and the support that is available.

The project was first piloted in Devon with funding from the Lottery and was developed with the help of people living with sight loss themselves. The Sight Loss M.O.T helps identify the services, support and training that can help maintain independence, wellbeing and choice for blind and partially sighted people.

We have been using the Sight Loss M.O.T for a few months now and have received positive feedback from visually impaired people we are supporting. We are confident that staff are already delivering a great service: the new framework means we can be sure we are providing consistent advice and support. The Sight Loss M.O.T focuses on the following areas:

- 1. Understanding your eye condition and the registration process.**
- 2. Making the best use of your sight.**
- 3. Your health and wellbeing.**
- 4. Managing at home and equipment aids.**
- 5. Getting out and about.**
- 6. Your finances and planning for the future.**
- 7. Work, learning and having your say.**
- 8. Having someone to talk to.**

Our Sight Loss Advisor will go through each section to identify where support may be needed and the best way this can be provided. It will take approximately an hour to complete the M.O.T, and will normally be revisited over a period of time. Fact sheets with further information are available covering some sections in more detail.

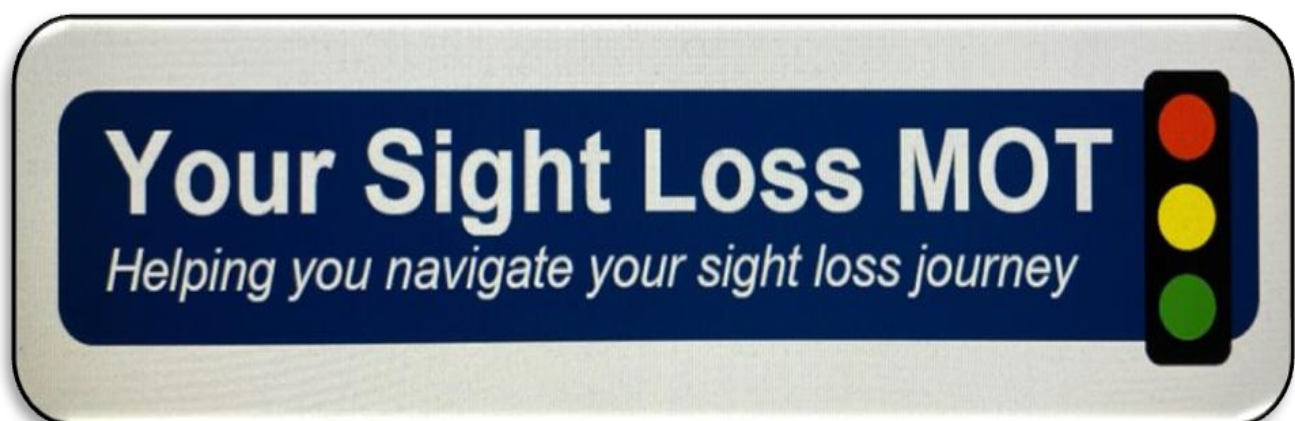
Staff will use a traffic light system to track where people are as they begin their journey with us, so that we can celebrate positive steps forward together. Southend in Sight are on hand to offer the targeted support that is needed.

As we work through the M.O.T, an action plan will be formed and a review meeting booked in for 3 to 6 months. This gives everyone time to digest the information and to put individuals in touch with the relevant organisations.

Support needs and aspirations will be unique to each individual seeking our help. We can, with permission, work closely with health, social care and other charities in the area to bring together the information, equipment, training and support that is right for you. This might include, for example, passing your information to the rehabilitation team for them to assess your home for possible adaptations.

Please be assured that the information we record is kept securely and we do not share it with anyone else without an individual's consent. Data protection will be discussed at your first point of contact with us.

Our team are keen to help as many local visually impaired people as possible with their support needs and we may carry out our initial conversation over the phone, allowing us to identify those areas that require further help. If you are newly diagnosed, or have been living with sight loss and perhaps need further or specific help, please get in touch with the team on **01702 342131** to book an appointment. We look forward to carrying out a Sight Loss M.O.T with you in the not too distant future!



Rising Costs

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

None of us can fail to have noticed the rise in costs over the last few months. Every time we make a trip to the supermarket, there is an extra 10 or 20 pence on numerous everyday items in our shopping basket. There is the rise in fuel costs, making any means of transport more expensive, as well as a hike in energy prices with us all paying more to heat our homes.

As a registered visually impaired person, you may be entitled to extra help with these costs. We cannot make any guarantees, but now might be the right time to investigate exactly what your tax and benefit entitlements are.

We would suggest that you start with the RNIB Tax Advice service. They can help with the following:

- Blind Person's Allowance.
- Marriage Allowance.
- Married Couple's Allowance.
- Tax on savings.
- Getting help with tax forms.
- Self Assessment tax returns.
- Tax codes.
- Claiming a tax refund and underpayments.
- Tax Credits claims, renewals and issues.
- Personal Tax Account.
- VAT free goods, services and building work.

RNIB Tax Advice Service.

Telephone: **0345 330 4897**. Open weekdays: 9am to 5pm.

Email: tax@rnib.org.uk. Website: rnib.org.uk/tax.

Blind Person's Allowance.

You can claim the Blind Person's Allowance if you're registered blind or severely sight impaired. The allowance is £2,520 (for the tax year 2021

to 2022), a tax saving of up to £504 at the basic rate and up to £1,008 at the higher rate. You can transfer all or part of the allowance to your spouse or civil partner. Claims can be backdated four years to April 2017.

When you are making calls to the HMRC please make sure you have your National Insurance details to hand.

HMRC Contact Details.

- Income Tax and Savings: **0300 200 3300.**
- Self Assessment: **0300 200 3310.**
- National Insurance: **0300 200 3500.**
- Tax Credits: **0345 300 3900.**
- VAT reliefs for disabled people: **0300 123 1073.**

Did you know that you can buy certain products specifically designed for disabled people without paying VAT on them? VAT relief may be available if you're having building work done in your home because of your disability, for example if you're having a new bathroom or toilet installed or an existing bathroom or toilet extended or adapted. Visit [gov.uk/financial-help-disabled/vat-relief](https://www.gov.uk/financial-help-disabled/vat-relief) for more information.

Tax Help for Older People provide free professional advice on personal tax to those aged 60 or over on lower incomes.

Telephone **01308 488 066**, weekdays 9am to 5pm.

Visit [taxvol.org.uk](https://www.taxvol.org.uk).

TaxAid provide free independent tax advice to people on lower incomes.

Telephone **0345 120 3779**. Visit [taxaid.org.uk](https://www.taxaid.org.uk).

For advice on what to do if you are struggling to pay your energy bills, please contact **Citizens Advice Southend**. Telephone: **08082 78 79 78**.

Visit [citizensadvice.org.uk](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/southend).

The government and Ofgem websites also suggest that you can ask for support with your energy supply and bills if you are vulnerable. Living with sight loss is included on their list as being applicable. Their advice is to call your energy supplier directly and ask to be added to their Priority Services Register.

Please do call our team on **01702 342131** for further advice – if we are unable to help, we can put you in touch with someone who can.

Better Than Biscuits

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

We were delighted to host the Phoenix Writing Group book launch at our Sight Loss Centre in March. Our very talented Charity Shop Manager Lois is a member and avid writer herself.

The Phoenix Writing Group has been active for ten years and its latest anthology, *Better than Biscuits*, is available to buy from Amazon in hard-back, paper-back and kindle forms. It contains a rich mix of short stories and poems which are the perfect length to read with a cup of tea and possibly a biscuit. Fifty percent of the proceeds from the sales are going to Southend in Sight.

The group are also looking to produce an audio book so that the charity's members and other visually impaired readers can enjoy it. The writers have set up a crowd funding appeal to raise the funds needed. To donate, please search "*audio book for the visually impaired*" on the Go Fund Me website.

The book's launch was attended by members of the writing group, (pictured right) with a welcome speech from Southend in Sight trustee Stephanie Cooper and the Phoenix Writing Group leader Kim Kimber, giving readings from the book.



We are very grateful to the Phoenix Writing Group for choosing our charity and we wish them all great success with the sale of their new book and the fundraising for their audio-book. If you would like more details on the Phoenix Writing Group or if you are interested in becoming a writer yourself, please call our office.

Tech Talent

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

Our Tech Team have been working hard throughout lockdown and beyond to try to meet the needs of local visually impaired people. They have appointments booked in the diary most weeks to provide help and support with mobile phones, tablets and laptops. Those they meet with say that sometimes just one small adaption can make a huge difference to their lives and most importantly their independence.

One such young lady they met with was Aya. Steve and Paul advised Aya and her family a few years ago, showing her a few short cuts and Apps that were relevant at the time.

Aya is now 15 and a very bright and confident young lady. She offered to visit our Centre and show our Tech Team what she has achieved. Aya has learnt to use her laptop – a Mac Book Pro – and more importantly has taught herself how to use voiceover on it. This allows her to complete her own schoolwork and other tasks independently.

Aya, pictured right with Paul and Steve, quite enjoyed being the teacher for a change and showing our Tech Team what to do! It really was a joy to behold how far Aya has come in just a short space of time. She now has plans for university and beyond, and we wish her every success with whatever she chooses to do in the future.

If you would like help and advice with your mobile, tablet or laptop, please call our office to make an appointment on **01702 342131**.



Community Activities

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

We are pleased to have a near normal raft of events and activities in the calendar for the coming months, some new and some well established...

Coffee Mornings.

We now have a regular slot for our coffee mornings on the first Friday of every month. They are open to anyone living locally with sight loss to come along and meet others in a similar situation to their own. There is no need to call and book a place, just turn up. You are welcome to bring a friend.

Dates: 1 July, 5 August, 2 September.

Venue: The Ekco Club, Thornford Gardens, Southend, SS2 6PU.

Time: 10:30am to 12pm.

Cost: £1 for tea/coffee/cake.

Bowling.

Our ten pin bowling teams still meet up every Thursday to bowl at CJs in Hockley. As mentioned in the last newsletter, the National Blind Tenpin Bowling Association has closed. However, Captain Anne Morris was invited by British Blind Sport to attend their bowling finals in Sheffield with her partner Keith and play for the Brenda Moore Memorial Cup – the duo only went and won the trophy!

Her three teams – The Kinch Pins, The Misfits and The Southend VIPers – will be joining the British Blind Sport league this summer and hope to try out the recently opened bowling alley in Southend.

Lawn Bowling.

We have a taster session for lawn bowling booked in with the Essex County Bowling Club on Imperial Avenue in Westcliff:

Date: Wednesday 29 June.

Time: 1:30pm – 3pm.

Please wear flat clean shoes. Places are limited so please call our office if you are interested in joining this free session.

Families and Children.

We have a seaside themed creative activity session for children booked with The Art Ministry at The Ekco Club, Thornford Gardens, Southend:

Date: Wednesday 3 August.

Time: 1pm-3pm.

This activity is suitable for ages 4 to 12. Siblings are welcome to join in, but parental supervision is required. Places are limited so please call our office to book ahead.

The Arts Society Thames Estuary is very kindly funding the session.

Have Your Say.

Way back in 2017 we asked a cross section of people living locally with sight loss to complete a short survey on what services they would like to be offered to help them remain independent and live well. This then helped us to plan the services that we offer.

5 years on and after living through a pandemic and lockdowns, we wanted to revisit this participation project and ask what is important to you as a visually impaired person and what has changed for the better or worse since COVID.

If you would like to be actively involved and help our charity use the resources they have to deliver the community services that are wanted, then we need you to sign up and “have your say”!

We will be holding our first meeting in small groups at our Sight Loss Centre at 117 Hamlet Court Road on **Friday 15 July**, with the morning session starting at **10:30am** and the afternoon session starting at **1:30pm**. Please call our office to register your interest for this important project – we really need your input.

Annual Exhibition.

We recently organised some demonstration days with a few of our suppliers at our Centre. Our next planned supplier event will be our annual exhibition on **Friday 28 October** from **10am to 2pm** at **The Holiday Inn, Southend Airport**. More details will be available on this event in the next newsletter.



***Southend in Sight is the
Community Services Division of
Southend Blind Welfare Organisation.
Registered Charity No. 1069765***



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