

Welcome to our Spring edition of “In Touch”. There is a celebratory theme running through this issue, as we look back at the achievements of the last year and have much to be thankful for in 2023.

2022 was a busy year for the team, with an average of 20 new people coming to us for help every month. We delivered 1,238 sessions of support: this includes over the phone, home visits and deliveries, as well as face to face appointments in our Centre – a body of work to be proud of. However, with over 6,500 people living with sight loss in the Southend area alone, we know there is still more we can be doing.



In January, we celebrated the success of our work with Community Engagement Officer Georgie Haynes, who won a Southend City Jubilee Award. She is pictured left collecting her trophy with colleague Anne Morris. They attended the ceremony at Porter’s Lodge, presided over by Southend City Mayor Kevin Robinson, along with fellow award winner and Southend in Sight volunteer Mary Forsdyke and visually impaired member Jenny Sargent.

On learning she had won the award for her service to the community, Georgie said:

“I am accepting the award on behalf of all the volunteers and staff at Southend in Sight who do such an amazing job supporting local visually impaired people.” Chairman of our Trustees Russell Cable said: “This is well deserved recognition for all Georgie’s hard work and dedication – she is such an asset to the team, always going above and beyond to help people.”

It is lovely for staff members to be appreciated, but the real heroes of the day are our volunteers who give up their time for free, and our local champions who raise awareness of sight loss and funds to help the charity. You can hear more about their stories on pages 8, 9 and 11.

Team Talk

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

This year seems to have got off to a flying start, with a flurry of phone calls and appointments in our Centre. Coralie and Claire supported 435 individuals last year, carrying out a total of 145 Sight Loss MOT assessments. They don't show any signs of slowing up and do still have a waiting list, but rest assured they will be in touch as soon as possible to offer the best support available.

Our Tech team were also busier than usual last year, delivering 104 sessions to 57 individuals. They are aiming to run some small group sessions on particular topics such as downloading and accessing Apps, using voice over or sending emails. If you have any suggestions and would like help with anything technical, please contact the office on **01702 34 21 31**.

Our newly introduced activities seem to have gone down well with everyone. You will find a separate yellow sheet enclosed with this newsletter, listing



what is happening for the next 3 months. We welcome new people to our coffee mornings and Fun Fridays every month, alongside our regulars. Our pub meet-ups have encouraged some of our younger people to form friendships of their own. And our visually impaired bowlers seem to have so much fun every week, wearing crazy hats and running their own in-house competitions.

The photo features Jackie, Anne, Frank and “mad hatter” Georgie sporting rather strange headgear at a recent trip to the bowling alley.



Our Talking Book Club also seems to have taken off. “Almonds and Raisins” by Maisie Mosco was the first book up for discussion in 2023, which chronicles life for a Jewish family in Manchester during the first half of the 20th century. One of our members brought in some Jewish artifacts to “show and tell” everyone and help bring the story to life. Jan is featured in the photo to the left with her candelabra and other typical Jewish items from home.

Some of the book club members also made a trip to the cinema to try out the Audio Description for another of their chosen books, “A Man Called Ove”. The film, which starred

Tom Hanks, was thoroughly enjoyed by all. If you are interested in signing up for the free RNIB Talking Books service, or joining our Talking Book Club, please call us on **01702 34 21 31** for more information.

10 families enjoyed the pantomime at the Cliffs Pavilion again this December, and at half term a similar number took part in a bowling event at CJs in Hockley. It is so lovely for staff and volunteers to be able to provide a fun environment so that parents and children can get to know each other and offer support to one another.

The “Talk and Support” team continue to do a grand job keeping in touch with our more isolated members over the Winter months. They are still making regular calls to 80 people, ensuring those who are housebound and more vulnerable know that someone is thinking about them – it makes all the difference. Last year an incredible 1,984 calls were made through our “Talk and Support” project.

With 20 new people coming to us for advice every month, we know that Tracey, our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer, is making sure that everyone who is newly diagnosed is given information on where we are and what we can offer. Tracey has some very impressive stats of her own, and has an above average level of certification for visual impairment across the country. She is definitely working hard to put patients first and ensure they are given the support they need to live with their sight loss.

Living with a V.I.P

Anonymous Author.

This article was sent to us by the partner of someone living with sight loss, who wishes to remain anonymous. Their hope is that they can provide some words of wisdom for those who may be starting out on their sight loss journey and for the people who care for them...

People with good eyesight tend to live their lives differently from those who cannot see too well. Fully sighted people don't worry too much about lighting levels in the home or whether doors are open or closed. They know which drawer or cupboard things are kept in, how to locate items and can easily read paperwork and efficiently file it away. A glance around a room can tell a lot.

But if you cannot see clearly then adjustments need to be made by visually impaired people (V.I.Ps) and, just as importantly, by their sighted partner, spouse or carer. The following tips may be of help in understanding some of the changes that could make life easier around the home and when you are out and about.

"Out of sight, out of mind" is a saying familiar to us. This is most definitely applicable to someone living with sight loss who cannot see the everyday objects around them. Sighted partners may often find themselves reminding V.I.Ps where items are, what post needs their attention, what tasks need action, what food is available and the sell by dates.

"A place for everything, everything in its place" is another well known phrase which is pertinent to this article. A V.I.P may have to use methods in order to store, find and identify things which appear untidy or unusual to sighted people. These usually involve highly coloured or tactile storage containers which, to the VIP, are easily identifiable. Vivid coloured plastic bags for particular things, elastic bands around a container of hair conditioner to differentiate it from the shampoo are a few examples. Bump-ons can also help on kitchen appliances, thermostats, shower controls and other areas of daily life, all helping someone living with sight loss to maintain their independence.

It is probably best if the sighted partner doesn't tidy up too much (music to some people's ears, we are sure!). This ensures that the V.I.P can find things where they left them. Favourite storage places soon become familiar and make life easier for all concerned. Homes may appear untidy but it allows V.I.Ps to manage their lives better, improving their self-confidence and independence.

For those with much reduced vision, moving around at home can be difficult, if a little dangerous. Orientation is helped by leaving furniture in familiar places and keeping trip hazards to a minimum. A top tip to avoid accidents is to leave internal doors either fully open or closed. A half-closed door is a hazard to V.I.Ps who cannot see the leading edge of a door. Outstretched hands may pass either side of an unseen half open door with the head or face striking the edge. Ouch!

Another tip around the home is colour contrast. The trend in homes is often to decorate in coordinating colours that blend well together and to use low level mood lighting. For anyone living with sight loss, brighter overhead lighting and contrasting colours between flooring and furniture can make a huge difference. Patterned china dinner sets can lead to a V.I.P chasing non-existent food around a dinner plate. Small items of clothing laid out on a bed can also get lost on a patterned duvet cover. When vision is impaired, it is easy to confuse patterns with objects. Contrast is key!

Meeting others at social gatherings can be daunting for people with low vision. V.I.Ps should be introduced to others joining a conversation, and need to be told when people have left. This avoids the embarrassment of addressing an empty space! Similarly, circulation at social events is difficult without a guide, but is preferable to being sat in one place (and feeling ignored) while other guests stand and mill about. A verbal description of the room and the people in it can make everyone feel more at home.

And when you are out and about guiding someone with low vision, it is best to use "up step" or "down step", rather than "mind out, there's a step here!"

All these points are probably obvious to most people who know, socialise or live with someone who is visually impaired, or who themselves are living with sight loss. It is hoped that this article will be helpful to those who are newly diagnosed and their partners.

Low Cost Cooking

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

Here at Southend in Sight, we know that blind and partially sighted people are more likely to be affected by the rise in the cost of living. People with sight loss already face additional, unavoidable costs like taxi journeys, assistive technology and support in the home.

One way to be more energy efficient, while still providing a hot, nutritious meal, is by using a slow cooker. According to the Energy Saving Trust, a slow cooker is one of the most energy efficient kitchen appliances. On average, a slow cooker draws about the same amount of energy as a standard electric light bulb.

Staff and volunteers have been gathering together and sharing some of their favourite and easy to use recipes for the slow cooker. This is one a few of us have tried out and can recommend as being easy to prepare and, most importantly, we can vouch for it being very tasty!

“Throw and Go” Chicken Curry – Serves 4.

Ingredients:

- 1 diced onion.
- 1 diced red pepper.
- 3 chicken breasts.
- 1 can of tomato puree (150 grammes).
- 1 can of coconut milk (400 millilitres).
- 1 tablespoon of mango chutney or sweet pickle.
- 2 tablespoons of curry powder (mild or medium).
- 1 chicken stock pot.
- 1 teaspoon Garam Masala.
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin.

Method:

Throw all the ingredients into the slow cooker and mix well.
Put the lid on and set the slow cooker on a medium heat for 6 hours or a low heat for 8 hours.

If you wish, you could add some mushrooms and spinach or vegetables of your choice about an hour from the end of the cooking time.

Just before serving, either tear with forks or cut the chicken into bite sized chunks and mix well. Enjoy!

A microwave is also a good way to cook and save money, and we don't mean pre-bought ready meals! A microwave is more energy efficient than a traditional gas or electric oven as it only heats your food and not the air space inside. You could try out this microwave method of cooking rice to serve with your slow cooker chicken curry.

Savoury Vegetable rice - Serves 4.

Ingredients:

One and a half cups of long grain rice.

1 stock cube.

3 cups of boiling water.

1 cup of frozen mixed vegetables.

Method (for a 900 watt oven):

Wash the rice under cold running water to rinse away all the excess starch, place in a 1litre microwave proof dish with the stock cube and boiling water. Stir well and cook on HIGH power for 10 minutes, stir in the frozen mixed vegetables, return to the microwave and continue cooking on a MEDIUM power (50%) for 5 minutes until the rice is almost cooked.

Stir well, cover with a dinner plate and leave to stand for 5 minutes to complete the cooking time before serving.

Maybe you already have a slow cooker lurking in the back of your cupboard, or have not found that “go-to” recipe yet. Maybe you struggle for space in your kitchen. Whatever the reason, perhaps have a go and let us know the results. We will be happy to send out some large print tried and tested recipes to anyone living locally with a visual impairment. You can even get in touch if you have a favourite of your own that you are willing to share with others. We also have a second-hand talking microwave at our Centre – please call to ask if it still available.

If you are struggling with the cost of living, the RNIB has resources and help available. You can call their helpline on: **0303 123 9999**. Alternatively, please call our office on **01702 34 21 31** and speak to the team at Southend in Sight.

Community Champions

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

Continuing with our celebratory theme in this issue, we would like to congratulate two local ladies – Coral Carter and Linda Catling. Both have gone above and beyond in helping to support local people living with sight loss, something they have both experienced first-hand themselves.

Many of you may know Coral Carter. She has been the Leader of the Southend Macular Group since 2015. Coral was first diagnosed with macular degeneration in 2009, but it wasn't until after attending and enjoying the Wickford Macular Group, that Coral decided to set one up for the Southend area.

There are now 44 members who meet regularly for coffee, quizzes and outings, sharing their experiences of living with Macular. During the pandemic, Coral kept in touch with everyone with regular calls, a newsletter and phone-in.

Coral and her husband Frank have decided to step down as Leader and Treasurer, and just enjoy coming along as regular members. At the Southend Macular Group AGM held in February, our CEO Lucy thanked the couple for all their hard work over the years on behalf of Southend in Sight. Coral is shown in the photo receiving flowers from Lucy.



Coral's motto for the Southend Macular Group has always been "we talk, we laugh, we have fun".

It is clear that she will be leaving a legacy behind for Julie Powlette, the newly elected Leader, who in her own words "has some big boots to fill!" Julie hopes that she will be able to continue to provide this vital service for local people living with macular with the help of her committee.



Linda Catling, also known as “the Banksy of Leigh on Sea”, is a local celebrity with her fabulous crocheted toppers for the Marine Parade post box close to her home. Linda lost half her sight quite suddenly during the pandemic, and came to us for help with equipment in the home and technical support.

She was determined to carry on knitting, a hobby she has always loved. With some adaptations, Linda has exceeded even her own expectations with her crocheting, receiving Royal recognition along the way.

Linda is a busy lady and meticulously plans each post box creation far in advance. She has Mother’s Day and Easter all ready to go, and a “protest” against the road works around the town featuring Mr Mole and Mr Vole. And of course, she has a Coronation to think about...

Linda also wanted to give something back to the charity that had supported her, and started to fundraise for us by giving talks to local groups about her creations. Very soon, she was in demand and even just turning up to a school fete, as in the picture above, with a display of her natty knitting, was enough to persuade people to part with their money.

In 2022 alone, Linda gave 22 talks. She has already given 2 in 2023, has 7 more booked and has received a further 3 enquiries. To date she has raised £1,772 and has smashed her initial target of £1,000. Our thanks to Linda for brightening our days with her crocheted masterpieces and for raising so much money for us – what a woman!

The Art Ministry

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

The team at the Art Ministry has been running art and craft sessions for local blind and partially sighted people for over 20 years. The charity, which started back in 1992, received a three-year grant from the Southend Community Investment Fund last October to help support their work with adults and children living with sight loss.



Trustee and Session Leader Allan, pictured left with two of his attendees Cora and Linda says: “Since COVID we have found that people need to gain their confidence to meet back up again. We run very relaxed classes, where we offer ideas for a theme and use different materials, but really it’s a place where you are free to express yourself in whatever way you want. We had fun making Christmas decorations in December, last week we created

animals from felt, this week we are turning our hand to watercolours!”

On chatting to the “artists” that attend, there seems to be a mixed level of experience, with one lady having attended Central Saint Martins to study ceramics, and another never having picked up a brush before in her life! What is at the heart of their enjoyment of the classes is not just learning to improve their drawing skills, but their shared experience of living with sight loss.

Linda, who moved to Southend just before the first lockdown, says: “I enjoy the company as much as the creativity. I find the sessions very relaxing and I enjoy chatting to everyone and making friends”.

The Art Ministry run weekly sessions for adults on a **Monday** from **11am to 12:30pm** and classes for children on the **second Thursday of the month** from **4:30pm to 6pm**. The sessions are held at the **Ecko Club, Thornford Gardens, Southend**. There is a small cost of £2 per class. For more details, and to book your place, please call **The Art Ministry** on: **07582 025163**.

A “Bit of a Do”

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Community Fundraiser.

To celebrate with and thank our fantastic volunteers for all their support over the last year, we held our first Christmas party in 3 years at St Peter’s Church back in December.

Long service awards were handed to volunteers Wendy Campbell, Dianne Coutts, Clare McLewin, John Simmonds and Paul Weavers for 5 years and to Judith Beadle for 10 years. Dianne and Judith both volunteer in our charity shop along with John, who also helps at our events and is a keen fundraiser. Wendy helps at our coffee mornings and with our talk and support clients, while Paul is one of our invaluable tech gurus and bowling guide. Clare is a trustee who also offers “peer to peer” support at our drop-in sessions.

The entertainment at the volunteers’ party was provided by our newly formed visually impaired choir, the “In Sight Singers”, who are featured in the photo below, wearing their festive jumpers. They sang their hearts out with a repertoire of Christmas favourites, as well as tunes from Abba and Bob Marley.

The singers blew us all away, despite their nerves beforehand. It was a fitting end to the year with congratulations all round. The dedication, hard work and support of our volunteers enables our charity to continue providing services for local visually impaired people – we thank you all!



Southend in Sight – your local sight loss charity.

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