

Welcome to our Summer edition of “In Touch”. As we pack away the bunting from the recent Coronation and street parties, our thoughts turn to longer days, warmer nights, less rain and more sunshine!

We have a relaxed, summer feel to this newsletter with some articles on topics as diverse as gardening, football and comedy. Where else would you find such an eclectic mix of genres? They all have the central theme of living with sight loss of course, and how our readers and listeners have approached their change in circumstances in a positive way.

Take our children and young people for example. At a recent free bowling event, it was lovely to witness 7 families with visually impaired children competing against each other at the bowling alley. All the children received medals celebrating their efforts, as shown in the photo below, and all appreciated the freedom they had been given to bowl together and to celebrate what makes them different. We think our adult teams had better watch out, as there are some future stars in the making among them!



Team Talk

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager

The team of staff here at Southend in Sight seem to get busier and busier, so much so that we still haven't managed a staff outing after our Christmas get together was cancelled due to illness!

Centre staff Coralie and Claire are juggling a huge workload as they try to squeeze in as many face to face and phone appointments as possible during the working day. It takes time to write up the notes after a session too and make referrals to the appropriate people. Please bear with them as they work through their waiting list – rest assured they will be in touch as soon as they can.



Despite having 20 new people requiring support and advice a month, the Centre team found time to arrange a demonstration day with Professional Vision back in April. It was a busy day with back-to-back appointments for the supplier. Our clients found it to be very worthwhile, as it gave them a chance to test out the low vision equipment on offer, as shown in the picture to the left.

In the next newsletter, we will have details about our annual exhibition – a larger scale demonstration day with suppliers and their wares in abundance!

Our volunteer Tech Team are also as busy as ever, with 2 or 3 appointments back to back on some of their days. We know that tech is so important in this digital age, so do please call us for help navigating your smart phone, tablet or laptop.

Dean continues to look after our Talk and Support clients. At a recent staff meeting, he reported that he talks to 35 people out of the 80 we support through this project. No wonder he is such a popular young man! We rely on our brilliant volunteers to chat to the other 45 on our list – our thanks as always to them for helping to provide this much needed and much appreciated support.

Georgie continues to provide social activities for all ages throughout the week. If she is seen at all in the office, she can be found filling up her treat box for coffee mornings and Talking Book Club, printing out large print song sheets for the choir (while humming an Abba tune), or on the phone arranging entertainment for the next Fun Friday.



As well as her regular activities, Georgie likes to make her job even busier by throwing in a one-off event every few months. Back in March, she organised a fish and chip lunch for 30 local visually impaired people and their guests. Entertainment was provided by fabulous local singer Marie Saunders, with some of our members taking a turn on the dance floor with staff and volunteers. It was a

chance for old friends like Kathy and Rose pictured above to be reunited and for new friendships to be formed. You will find a yellow separate flier in the envelope with this newsletter containing the upcoming dates for our regular activities.

Anne and her bowlers are still going strong, meeting most Thursdays at CJs in Hockley. A small group of bowlers were due to attend the British Blind Sport Bowling Finals in Sheffield in May, but the event was cancelled due to a train strike. Despite the disappointment, the competitive teams continue to do well in their league, with social bowling growing in popularity as well.

We always seem to leave Tracey until last, but she is definitely a much appreciated and hard-working member of the team, supporting patients at Southend Hospital Eye Clinic. Tracey also provides insight into and training on living with sight loss for the doctors and consultants working at the hospital, making sure the needs of local visually impaired people are considered. If you are worried about your hospital appointment or would like some advice or information about your Certificate of Visual Impairment, you can call Tracey directly on **01702 43 55 55 extension 7025.**

You can reach any member of the team at Southend in Sight by calling **01702 34 21 31.**

Sensory Gardening

Written by Geoff, a keen gardener.

You may remember that Southend in Sight was asked to advise on the replanting of the sensory space in Leigh Library Gardens. The first meeting took place almost 2 years ago now, so we thought it was about time to report back with an update. Our man on the ground, Geoff, has this to say...

Some years ago, the Leigh Rotary Club sponsored the building and planting of a sensory garden in the Leigh Library Gardens. These gardens are managed by Southend City Council and there is a large and talented volunteer force who look after the whole of the gardens known as the Friends of Leigh Library Gardens (FOLLG). These volunteers attend weekly to develop and tidy these gardens which are a popular attraction for local residents and visitors alike.

The sensory garden comprised a raised bed about 75 feet (23 metres) long with a braille plaque by the entrance. Both the raised bed and the ground level flower bed which adjoins the back of the library building face south and get plenty of sun. There is a pathway with benches between these two beds.

The raised sensory garden bed was planted with tactile and fragrant leaved plants. Many of these original plants had grown quite large, or had become woody and unproductive - unsurprising for plants that were anything up to seventy years old! The intention of a sensory garden is to enable people who are challenged by sight loss to enjoy a garden through fragrance, sound or touch. Bright colours may also be appreciated as many people who are sight impaired do have some residual sight.

Friends of Leigh Library Gardens (FOLLG) have made a huge difference to the content and quality of the gardens with the agreement and support of Southend City Council. Last year they agreed, with the help of Southend in Sight and some funding from Leigh Rotary Club, to renovate the sensory garden and it was expanded to include the library wall bed and pathway.

Proposals were made to take several plants out, prune other plants and put in new plants and shrubs. The aim has been to provide interest for each season in both the raised bed, the library wall bed and the pathway. There are not many plants which are perennial (i.e they come back each year) with most fragrant colourful plants being tender and unable to withstand cold winters (annuals). So, it is not just a case of planting and 'leaving them to get on with it'. Colour and scent have been introduced into the raised bed through daffodils, forget-me-nots, perennial wallflowers (erysimum), heliotrope, sweet William, tulips and stock. Some have to be replaced each summer. Tactile plants such as grasses and the everlasting flower (helichrysum) which has a papery feel, have joined with fragrant leaved plants including mints, salvias and nepeta. All areas have been weeded (more than once!), mainly to reduce the self-seeding tree and perennial weed seedlings. The path has been weeded and planted with corsican mint, which when touched provides a fragrance of crème de menthe, and a low growing thyme. However, last summer's drought put paid to success at the first attempt and this planting in the path will be repeated.



The bed behind the benches has been tidied and the space has been planted with fragrant roses (Gertrude Jekyll and Rhapsody in Blue), shrubs (trachelospermum and choisya), and perennials including tall fragrant phlox and veronica which the bees love, so introducing sound. The everlasting plant and a fragrant gladioli proved too tall for the raised bed in the first year and have been moved to the library wall bed to be better appreciated.

The sensory garden area now looks a lot brighter and more attractive to visitors and complimentary remarks

provide feedback that the volunteers are on the right track. All thanks to the efforts of Southend in Sight, Leigh Rotary Club and the volunteer gardeners. The photo above shows the raised beds in the sensory garden in bloom.

Fantasy Football

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

I'm sure many of us as children (and even as an adult!) have dreamed of meeting our football heroes. We have all imagined the roar of the crowd as we walk out onto the pitch, dressed in the kit of our favourite team wearing the number of our favourite player. For one local lad called Leo, his dream became a reality...



Leo is 8 and football mad. His Mum's side of the family are all big West Ham supporters, with his Grandad and his Auntie holding season tickets. The picture left shows Leo with his back to the camera showing off his bespoke Number 20 West Ham shirt with the name Leo at the top, signed by the players.

Leo was diagnosed with Ushers Type 3 in 2021 – a very rare syndrome leading to vision and hearing loss. He had been living with Ushers prior to then, but his family were all unaware. Leo has lost his central vision, but he is still too young to be tested to find out how much of his field vision he has lost. Some of you may remember that Leo drew the design for Southend in Sight's Christmas card in December 2021.

Leo's visual impairment has not stopped him from enjoying the beautiful game. He plays for a football club called Porters in Benfleet, a team for children and adults with a range of disabilities. Some of the adult team will be taking part in the Special Olympics World Summer Games this June in Berlin.



Leo's mum Keighley says that playing football for a team has made a huge difference to his confidence and has improved his social skills. When Leo was nominated to make some magical memories with the charity "Partyman's Magic Makers", his family jumped at the chance to make his dream come true – Leo was going to be a mascot for West Ham and walk out onto the pitch with his favourite player – Jarrod Bowen.

On the day, Leo's parents were alongside him, with his Auntie and Grandad watching from their seats above. Leo had a walk around the stadium beforehand and met "Bubbles", the teddy bear West Ham mascot. Keighley says that Leo was nervous beforehand but tried to put on a brave face. Leo has cane practice at school, but is not a big fan of using it. The photos show Leo holding a signed football on the pitch before the game, and then with his cane, holding onto Jarrod Bowen, leading the West Ham players out before their match – a proud moment for all the family.



On his return to school, Leo was excited and a little overwhelmed as he told his friends all about his experience and how nice it was to meet his hero – Jarrod Bowen. He had printed off photos for them all to see, but most of them had caught his moment of glory on the television the night before. Some truly amazing memories made for a very deserving young man.

Tech Tips

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

While I am no tech expert myself, I can appreciate a good, simple device that can enhance your enjoyment of life. For those living with sight loss tech can be more difficult to use, but once you have the know-how, it can make a real difference.

This very newsletter, which is recorded for us by Rochford, Rayleigh and Castle Point Talking Newspaper, can now be listened to on your phone, tablet or laptop, and even through your Alexa. The good people at British Wireless for the Blind Fund have used their tech prowess and enabled this to happen for us behind the scenes. I should also mention Mike from Wickford Talking Newspaper for his input and guidance along the way. These things don't happen without a bit of teamwork between fellow charities!

“In Touch” will still be available via email, on CD and in print format, but if you would prefer to listen to our newsletter “online”, do please contact our office and we can send you the link.



For those of you who already use an Alexa, the following instructions, which have been tested in our Centre by me, as demonstrated in the photo, will allow you access.

Once your Alexa is fully set up, connected to the WiFi and ready to go, you will need to say: “Alexa, enable Talking Newspapers”. Follow the prompts given by Alexa, and she will ask which Talking Newspaper you would like to listen to. You will say, “Southend in Sight In Touch June

2023”. Hopefully, this should mean that you will be listening to the latest edition of our newsletter. If not, please call our offices for further help and we will talk you through the process. Happy listening!

In other tech news, the RNIB has just brought out the Accord combination USB player and Bluetooth speaker. It is their most advanced audio device and is designed specifically for blind and partially sighted users, with easy-to-use tactile controls, wireless charging, easy-to-locate ports, bookmarking features and chapter skipping function. It is priced around the £50 mark.



Small (pictured left, with the charging dock) and highly portable, you can listen to Talking Books on USB and any other audio via Bluetooth – podcasts, BBC Sounds, Audible audiobooks, even your ‘dance like nobody’s watching’ playlist. If your smartphone or tablet can play it, you can listen to it on the RNIB Accord.

The rechargeable battery provides five to six hours listening on a full charge. With its high quality speaker, the RNIB Accord is a good way to listen to your favourite things in the living room, kitchen, garden or shed. Weighing only 384g (less than a tin of tomato soup!), you can easily move it with you as you go about your day. It is supplied with a brightly coloured lanyard attached for extra security.



Another new version of a popular piece of equipment is the “Twist 2 Go” lamp, priced at around £70 - pictured left with its charger. This is a rechargeable, portable, ergonomically designed task light suitable for all types of eye conditions, providing high contrast and clarity. The easy twist shade allows the light to be positioned and directed exactly where you need it, while the brightness of the daylight LEDs can be adjusted using the tactile 3 step dimmer button.

For more information on how to purchase the equipment detailed above or any “tech” queries, please call our office on **01702 34 21 31**. Please note that both the speaker and light are popular items and as such are in and out of stock very quickly.

No laughing matter...

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

Markus Birdman, a comedian with over 20 years in the business, first came to us about a year ago for support, after losing half his sight following a stroke during lockdown. He has since used his comedy to talk about his unique experience and a topic he says is “often sniggered over”.



Markus says: “Sight loss has really taken some getting used to. I remember the day I was registered as visually impaired. It made me cry. I think before, I’d said to myself ah it’s ok. Others have it far worse. I’ve only lost 50%. I sort of didn’t admit to myself I had a disability. But there it was, in black and white. A journalist actually asked me if I see life differently after my stroke. I replied, yes, about half of it!”

Markus (pictured left in a publicity shot for his latest show) goes on to say: “I try to approach living with sight loss as best I can and talk about it in my comedy. Not to be glib, but as a way of coping and a way to raise awareness. Because I don’t look visually impaired. Many don’t. I was given a white stick. I should use it more as a sign for people to avoid me – a bit like learner plates on a car!”

Markus has certainly poured his energy into his comedy – his Edinburgh Fringe show has earned him a nomination for the 2023 Chortle Awards, with critics saying of him: “A torrent of formidable gags, skilfully told, and with a gripping story underpinning them all.” He has also recently written for Jayde Adams and supported Jason Manford at the Palladium.

Markus has a new show – Platinum – and will be performing locally at the Palace Theatre on Friday 1 September at 7:30pm. Tickets can be purchased from the box office by calling **0343 310 0030**.

Volunteer's Week

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

We will be celebrating with our wonderful volunteers during Volunteer's Week, which runs from 1-7 June this year. Unfortunately, this will take place after this issue goes to print, so expect a feature on dancing and merriment next time!

However, this doesn't mean that we can't sing the praises of everyone who gives their time to support us. Behind the scenes we have 7 Trustees who lead the charity and ensure we can sustain our services in the future. We also have 9 Talk and Support volunteers making calls from their own home, 2 Tech team volunteers offering invaluable IT advice and over 30 shop volunteers all helping to raise funds for the charity.



Our regular and one-off events can only happen through the support of the 6 volunteers featured in the photo to the left at a recent Coronation themed coffee morning. They provide refreshment, guiding, friendship and sometimes become dance partners, when called upon!

We do have some sad news about a former volunteer – Sheila Mayfield. She and her husband Cliff moved to the South Coast to be near family before COVID, having

both volunteered in our shop and at events for over 10 years. Sheila passed away at the end of April having received a cancer diagnosis last Autumn. Our thoughts are with Cliff and her family at this sad time.

We value all our volunteers and think of them as part of our extended Southend in Sight family. The charity was started by volunteers back in 1958 and we will always be grateful to everyone who has helped make us what we are today.

Southend in Sight – your local sight loss charity.

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