

Welcome to our Autumn edition of “In Touch”. After a somewhat disappointing Summer weather wise, we look forward to keeping you all busy over the coming months with some new activities we are planning.



Many of our readers and listeners will have encountered the lovely Anne Morris over the past 20 plus years. We decided it was about time we celebrated Anne’s dedication as our longest serving staff member and (almost) longest serving volunteer, with an award and

heartfelt speeches at our recent volunteer’s celebration. The photo shows Anne with Chairman of the Trustees Russell Cable being presented with flowers by Southend Mayor Stephen Habermel.

Anne’s first task as a paid member of staff back in 2004 was to call members and check details, work that she enjoyed and was good at as she had empathy with our clients. Her role today is not dissimilar – she still chats to people on a regular basis and makes calls to those who are at the start of their sight loss journey and in need of that all important peer-to-peer support. Anne of course, has also run our bowling group since 2009, and has enjoyed a few victories over the years.

Anne represents what is at the heart of our charity – a desire to help and support local people. She is a huge advocate for volunteering, telling anyone who will listen that there is a strong family feel at Southend in Sight where everyone is welcome and you can meet people like yourself – we couldn’t have said it better ourselves. Thank you Anne for all your hard work, determination and dedication over the years – here’s to the next 21!

# Team Talk

**Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager**

This June was one of the busiest we can remember, with 24 new clients coming to us for advice and support via our Centre during the month. Our Sight Loss Advice team have worked hard and managed to reduce their waiting list slightly. And we are pleased to say that our regular Wednesday morning drop-in sessions with volunteers Jackie and Clare have proved very popular for general advice. As always, please call our office to chat to the team and to book an appointment for I.T, form filling and specialised advice and support.



We always have a selection of second-hand equipment available at our Centre, with items such as hand held magnifiers or talking clocks. We also have a supply of the large electronic magnifiers (CCTV) for loan or purchase, like the one being demonstrated in the photo. We have recently delivered 4 of these out to local people to use in their homes.

If anyone does have a spare/unused CCTV they would like to donate to us, please do get in touch as we would like to replenish our supply of these popular items.

Talk and Support is still going strong with 6 new people joining the scheme in the last few months. Luckily, we have recruited 2 new volunteers to chat to others on a regular basis. This project is now in its fourth year with a strong need for this type of support, especially in the early stages of a new diagnosis. Our thanks to Dean, Anne, Georgie and all the volunteers who make this happen – you are all stars!

Captain Anne is on a well-earned break over the summer holidays. Her bowling group tend to not meet when the children are off school as the bowling alley becomes very crowded. However, they have plans for some in house competitions this Autumn. There will be an award for the most improved player, in memory of Kath Kinch - scores will be collected and the

handicap calculated! A 5 pin knockout challenge will also take place, in memory of Ron Gent. The winners of both awards will keep the trophy for a month. If anyone would like to join the bowling group, please do get in touch – they are a friendly bunch and welcome newcomers with open arms.



Our social activities continue to be well attended, with something for everyone we hope! We are pleased to welcome newcomers every month to our coffee mornings and Fun Fridays, as well as our regulars. Our Talking Book Club is still going strong with a new book being chosen by a different member each month. We are planning some new activities for our younger working

age group – more details to follow once we have spoken to them and gathered opinions...

The children we support have enjoyed a soft play evening at Kid's Kingdom and a morning of fun with Just Ride this summer. The photo left shows some of the children with parents and volunteers on the track at Garon's Park after a few laps of cycling. We are also planning an event at a local climbing wall and a trip to the Pantomime again at Christmas.

Our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer Tracey continues her work at Southend Hospital. Over the last few months, she has supported hundreds of patients with their appointments and aftercare, as well as ensuring newly diagnosed people receive their certificate of visual impairment. Much like our Centre staff, Tracey had a busy month in June, with 182 patients and 52 CVI's processed. Tracey has also seen a rise in referrals from other departments following training for hospital staff, as they are now more aware of the advice and support on offer to local people living with sight loss. 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.**



# New Activities and Offers

**Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.**

We initiated a new programme of activities almost a year ago now, after speaking to a cross section of local people living with sight loss and asking them what they wanted. With the help of a grant from the Community Investment Board, we have been able to expand our activities even further!

Our choir began last year, starting off small and taking place in our Centre at Hamlet Court Road. They have learnt about 15 songs, have performed at our Christmas volunteer celebration and even have a name for themselves – the “Insight Singers”. Their next public performance will be at our AGM this October.



The choir, pictured left with their leader Val, meet twice a month (the second and fourth Wednesday) to practice and are now wanting to attract some new recruits. From September, they are meeting at a new, larger venue - Avenue Baptist Church on Milton Road in Westcliff – in order to accommodate more people.

The choir would all agree they have varying degrees of talent and experience, but they do thoroughly enjoy every singing session. Jackie, who initially asked for the choir to be set up and is a fully signed up member since the start, says: “Singing really does cheer you up. Living with sight loss can be isolating, but being part of a group is very uplifting. I always have a smile on my face at the end of each meeting”. Details of when the choir takes place are outlined in the yellow activities flyer slotted into the newsletter.



We have recently started a line dancing group, which is still in the pilot stage. However, after just a few sessions, there is much enthusiasm for this to continue. The group have so far managed to follow the steps, shuffle, grapevine, stomp and turn (sometimes) in time to the music. The photo

above shows our group of lovely ladies in a line with their arms around each other, laughing. We will report back on their progress in the next newsletter!

And last but not least, we have been awarded a 2 year grant from Independent Age, which focuses on the cost of living crisis affecting people over the age of 65. We can now offer a form filling service to anyone living in the Southend area with sight loss. This includes help with Attendance Allowance, Blue Badges and other benefits. We will also continue to offer one to one I.T support sessions to help you get online. Please call our offices to book an appointment for either of these services.

We are also starting a FREE monthly lunch club from October, meeting on the second Tuesday of every month from 12pm to 1:30pm at The Ekco Club, Thornford Gardens, Southend, SS2 6PU. Come along and join Southend in Sight for a light lunch and chat. We will have staff and experts on hand offering advice and guidance on living with sight loss. We do ask that you call our office to book your place first.

Don't forget we still have our coffee mornings on the first Friday of every month, Fun Friday on the third, bowling every Thursday, and weekly art sessions on a Monday during term time with the Art Ministry. For more information on any of the activities or services mentioned, please call our office on **01702 34 21 31**.

# Access All Areas

## Extracts from Spotlight, Essex Sight's Newsletter.

A few top tips for saving money this Autumn...

### C.E.A (Cinema) Card.

The C.E.A Card is a national scheme developed for UK cinemas by the UK Cinema Association (UKCA). The Card enables a person with a disability to receive a complimentary ticket for someone to accompany them when they visit a participating cinema. They will be able to provide any assistance you may need during your visit, such as helping you move around the cinema including finding and taking a seat or making use of the cinema's facilities.



To get the free ticket, you will need to purchase a full price ticket for yourself for the same performance of the same film in the same auditorium. Approximately 90 per cent of cinemas accept the card but you should check with your chosen cinema to make sure they participate in the scheme.

The photo to the left shows members of our talking book club attending a film at the Southend Odeon.

The cardholder should be registered either Sight Impaired (S.I) or Severely

Sight Impaired (SSI) or in receipt of one of the following:

- Disability Living Allowance (DLA)
- Attendance Allowance (AA)
- Personal Independence Payment (PIP)
- Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP)

The card is valid for one year from the date of issue and there is a £6 fee to cover the costs in running the scheme.



For more information, please contact the C.E.A on:

Telephone: **01244 526 016**.

Textphone: **18001 01244 526 016**.

Email: **info@ceacard.co.uk**

## **Theatres.**

Many theatres now run signed and relaxed performances, as well as providing infra red loop systems and wheelchair spaces.

Similar to the cinema scheme, you can usually bring along a companion for free or at a greatly reduced rate as well if you are blind or partially sighted. You will need to call the theatre/ticket company in question to check and register before purchasing tickets. They will ask you to provide proof of your visual impairment when you turn up and then keep a record of this for future performances. Locally, the Cliffs Pavilion and Palace Theatre both offer a free companion ticket. To register, please call the box office on: **0343 310 0030**.

## **Articles for the Blind.**

Articles for the Blind is a scheme for blind and visually impaired customers who are registered as Severely Sight Impaired (SSI) or Sight Impaired (S.I). This free service effectively waives the postage (first class only) for sending items that have been specially produced or adapted for blind and partially sighted people such as large printed media, audio or electronic media and equipment with a 7kg maximum weight limit for any package.

To send items under the scheme, simply write "ARTICLES FOR THE BLIND" on the front of the envelope and the sender's name and address clearly on the reverse of the envelope. Mail must be open or easy to open for inspection.

If you are concerned, contact customer services on **0345 607 6140** for permission to seal it or take your item to your local Post Office where it can be checked and sealed by the counter staff. Mail must be addressed to the blind or visually impaired person at that address. Items that are addressed to "The Occupier" or "Dear Customer" etc. and not a named recipient cannot be sent under this scheme. Nor should you send personal, sensitive, or financial information; that should be sent as normal, paid-for mail.

# Volunteering Opportunities

**Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.**

As you will have already heard, we recently celebrated over 21 years of service with staff member and volunteer Anne Morris. Anne is typical of the type of people who help support Southend in Sight in a volunteering role.

Our charity was started by volunteers (members of the Southend Round Table) back in 1958, and has always relied on the dedication and commitment from people willing to give up their time to enrich the lives of local blind and partially sighted people. At present we have 11 staff members and over 60 volunteers helping to run our services. We value all our volunteers and think of them as part of our extended Southend in Sight family. Behind the scenes we have 10 Talk and Support volunteers making calls from their own home, 2 Tech team volunteers offering invaluable I.T advice, 3 form filling volunteers 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 volunteers featured in this photo, taken at a Coronation themed coffee morning. They provide refreshment, guiding, friendship and sometimes become dance partners, when called upon! What a fantastic bunch they are – we really couldn't run our events without them.



Perhaps the most important area in which volunteers support our charity is by helping to shape and sustain our services both now and longer term as members of our Board of Trustees. Some of our Trustees have been with us for over 30 years, and bring a rich mix of skills and experience to the table.

The Board are looking for new Trustees to help realise their exciting plans for the future. They are particularly keen to recruit people with experience of living with sight loss and those with expertise in property/building development, fundraising and finance. The Board of Trustees meet in the evenings at our Centre in Westcliff on a quarterly basis.



Clare McLewin, a trustee with lived experience of sight loss, pictured left with some of her fellow trustees, says: “With a background in secondary education and a keen interest in technology, I was excited to be invited

to join the Board of Trustees in 2019. Having personally experienced the incredible work of the charity, I consider myself to be in a very privileged position of being both an active member and a trustee”.

If you are reading/listening to this and think you might have some spare time to help us, or you perhaps know a family member or neighbour who might fit the bill, please do get in touch! We are recruiting volunteers to our friendly team for all areas of our work – in our shop, for our activities and events and for our talk and support phone service.

If you are interested in volunteering, please visit our website to fill out an application form: [www.southendinsight.org.uk](http://www.southendinsight.org.uk), or you can call us on **01702 34 21 31** to find out more, or pop in and meet us at **117 Hamlet Court Road**.

# Guiding Training

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

Over the last few months, we have held our first face to face training sessions for staff and volunteers since before COVID.

We welcomed Penny and Mike Hefferan, along with Guide Dog Questa, to our Centre to run several sighted guiding training sessions. With many years of experience between them, the pair offered advice on how to safely guide the people we support daily through our services.

Penny, who has been registered severely sight impaired since birth, has a small amount of vision, which she puts to good use. Her main tips when guiding are to think about the importance of describing your surroundings and to treat everyone individually to ensure a safe and positive experience.

Liz Payne, Community Coordinator for Southend in Sight says: “If anyone was out and about on Hamlet Court Road during our training sessions, they may well have come across people with blindfolds, tentatively being guided across the road and back again. We even managed a spot of retail therapy in our charity shop to test our descriptive skills!”



CEO Lucy Martin says: “As a sight loss charity, we think it imperative that staff refresh their skills and any new volunteers receive guiding training as a matter of course. It gives us all a greater understanding of the challenges blind and partially sighted people face on a daily basis”.

The photo shows Mike and staff member Liz demonstrating a guiding technique in our Centre, with trainees looking on.

# Exhibition Time

**Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.**

Our annual exhibition will take place on **Wednesday 25 October 2023** at a new venue – **The Ekco Club, Thornford Gardens, Southend, SS2 6PU**. This popular event gives local visually impaired people the chance to try out equipment before making a purchase and meet with suppliers face to face. Our new venue has been chosen as it is familiar to many of those who attend our social activities, has ample free parking, is close to a bus stop and we are able to provide some refreshments for those attending in the bar area.

To minimise numbers at any given time, we are asking anyone that is thinking of attending to book an hour time slot: **10am-11am, 11am-12pm, 12pm-1pm, 1pm-2pm**. Please call our office on **01702 34 21 31** to register your booking. We found this system has worked well over the last few years and has allowed our suppliers to spend more time demonstrating equipment to attendees.

As we go to print, we have the following suppliers confirmed to attend:

**Associated Optical.**

**Humanware.**

**Optelec/Enhanced Vision.**

**Professional Vision.**

**Sight and Sound.**

**Vision Aid.**

We also welcome representatives from the local **Talking Newspapers, The Macular Society and Southend Carers, along with the Rehabilitation Team from Southend City Council and ECL (Essex Cares Ltd)**.

Our exhibition is a popular event, so please do remember to call and book your place.

**AGM.**

We will also be holding the Annual General Meeting (AGM) for Southend in Sight after the exhibition from 2:45pm onwards. Anyone is welcome to attend, but only official members have voting rights. The AGM will be opened with a performance from our choir – the “Insight Singers”.



## **Southend in Sight – your local sight loss charity.**

Registered Charity Number: 1069765

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### **Our Charity values:**

- Excellence
- Community
- Empowerment
- Support
- Integrity

**Your vision is our vision**

