

Welcome to our Winter edition of “In Touch”. It seems that 2023 has been a year of re-establishing what we are good at – helping people make connections with others. With more people turning to us for advice, we are acutely aware of the need for our phone calls, referrals, appointments and social activities and the difference we can make.

With this in mind, we discussed our priorities for the coming year at our recent AGM:

- No one faces sight loss unsupported.
- No one faces sight loss alone.
- We are inclusive and available to all.
- Our finances, resources and infrastructure meet the growing need.



We hope you will agree that as a local charity for people living with sight loss, our staff and volunteers do their best to achieve these aims. The photo to the left shows Claire, Liz and Coralie, part of the team of staff who help make this happen.

We are also pleased to welcome some new volunteers to the Southend in Sight family, following a recruitment drive over the last few months. We are always amazed at how willing local people are to give up their time to support our charity and our service users in whatever way they can. We can't thank them enough.

In this newsletter, we are featuring some of the wonderful people we support - our prize-winning bowlers and blind veteran Roy, as well as updating you all on what staff have been getting up to. Enjoy!

Team Talk

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager

As 2023 draws to a close, we can say with confidence that this has been our busiest yet. We have more people calling us and dropping in, 20 new people a month are reaching out to us for support, and more people are attending our social activities, ranging from 9 to 90 years old!



Our exhibition and AGM took place at the end of October at a new venue – The Ekco Club. We hold many of our social activities here as it is on a main bus route, has ample drop off and parking for cars and is cosy and welcoming. The feedback from those who attended has been very positive, and our suppliers were pleased to have the chance to meet and show their wares to over 50 local blind and partially sighted people. The photo to the left shows the Centre team of Coralie and Claire at the Southend in Sight stand at the exhibition.

Coralie and Claire are supporting as many people as they can with phone calls, referrals, drop ins and appointments. We know that their advice and information is gratefully received as they continue to be sent gifts and cards by way of thanks. This thanks extends to our tech team and our form filling volunteers too, all of whom are helping to make a difference to local people living with sight loss.

Continuing with this theme, we know that our Talk and Support phone calls are also very much appreciated. We now have 82 on our list for regular calls from Dean, Anne, Georgie and the team of 10 volunteers. In a recent survey we carried out, we were told the support from our visually impaired volunteers in particular, was a lifeline, especially in the early days of a sight loss diagnosis.

As we go to print, Community Engagement Officer Georgie is in the final stages of organising all her Christmas get togethers for everyone. The children and their families are off to the Panto, our younger adults have a pizza evening at our Centre and our older generation will be tucking into a full turkey dinner with entertainment.

Over the last few months, in addition to her regular activities such as line dancing, the choir, coffee mornings and Fun Fridays, Georgie has also organised an afternoon tea and a climbing wall event for children and young adults.

She also celebrated with her talking book club members on their first anniversary with tea and cake. They are pictured below sitting around a table in our Centre.



We have a full update on the bowling group on pages 4 and 5 of this newsletter. Anne has worked particularly hard to encourage some new members to join over the last few months, which has resulted in a lot of fun being had every Thursday morning at the bowling alley.

We always seem to mention Tracey last, even though she is often the first member of staff that many of those we support encounter.

She continues in her work at the hospital, training staff, processing Certificates of Visual Impairment and referring people on to other services, supporting people on their sight loss journey.

Please call the office on **01702 34 21 31** if you would like to talk to any member of the team about our services.

Bowling is back!

Written by Clare McLewin, Trustee and Bowler.

Following the summer break, our regular tenpin bowlers have returned to the lanes and now have their game faces on, as there are 3 new trophies to play for!



Our first award was especially chosen and engraved to remember our hugely missed colleague, Kath Kinch. As many of you will remember, Kath spent many years working tirelessly and selflessly for our charity and was a valued member and supporter of our tenpin bowling group.

We feel very honoured to be able to remember Kath in this special way and we are proud to announce that the first recipient of the “Most Improved Bowler in Memory of Kath Kinch” was Coral Carter (pictured left in a yellow jumper).

The second of our trio of trophies will be awarded monthly to recognise the achievements of our sighted volunteers and bowlers. Their help and support is invaluable to our visually impaired bowlers.

This particular trophy has been engraved to remember Pete Wright, one of our amazing volunteers who, not only gave his time to work at our centre, but was also a keen bowler and much-loved member of our bowling community.

The very first recipient of the “Best Sighted Bowler in Memory of Pete Wright” was Jane Glew, who just happens to be Coral’s daughter! It must run in the family...

We are privileged to remember Pete in this way and are extremely grateful that his wife, Sue, remains an active bowler and was there to see the first awarding of Pete’s trophy.



Congratulations to Jane (pictured left with the winner's silver cup) and many thanks to Sue and her family.

“No one misses the 5 pin”. For our tenpin bowlers, this phrase will always remind us of Ron Gent, a truly remarkable man, who goes down as a legend in our bowling community.

Ron was an extremely successful and popular bowler, who made everyone feel welcome with his ever-cheerful approach and cheeky sense of humour! Our bowlers still refer to “a Ron” if a certain single pin is left standing!

In remembrance of Ron, our bowlers are holding a monthly challenge, called “The Force Five”, trying to prove Ron's theory that “no one misses the 5 pin”. One of our newest bowlers, Ros Bailey, was awarded the first rather special golden pin, “The Force Five in memory of Ron Gent”.



We offer our congratulations to Ros (pictured left holding the golden pin trophy) and would like to take the opportunity to thank Sharon, Ron's wife, and their family for their support in enabling us to remember Ron in such a special way.

If you are interested in being part of the fun and joining our visually impaired tenpin bowlers, please contact Anne Morris on **01702 34 21 31**.

The bowlers meet every Thursday during term time at CJs bowling alley in Hockley. If transport to the venue is an issue, please do call us for advice. There's no excuse now!

Attendance Allowance

Adapted from the RNIB website.

There are a number of benefits available to support those living with sight loss. We know that with the Winter approaching and extra expense at Christmas, finances might be uppermost in people's minds.

In this issue, we are focussing on Attendance Allowance. If you have reached state pension age and need help with personal care or help to make sure that you are safe, you could be entitled to this benefit.

Do I qualify for Attendance Allowance?

You may qualify for Attendance Allowance if you have reached state pension age and need help to do things, like washing, dressing and choosing clothes, taking medication, reading and replying to mail, making and receiving phone calls and mobilisation (walking around safely). To make a claim you must also:

- Live in the UK
- Satisfy the past presence test (you must have been present in the UK for 104 out of the previous 156 weeks). You do not have to satisfy the past presence test if you have a terminal illness.

Attendance Allowance is not a means-tested benefit, so it doesn't matter how much other income or savings you have. You can get Attendance Allowance even if you live alone and don't have anyone looking after you; it is your need for help that is important.

You can spend any Attendance Allowance you receive however you like. It can be paid on top of other benefits and may even increase the number of other benefits you get. If you already get Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment, you cannot get Attendance Allowance as well.

Do I have to be registered blind or partially sighted to receive Attendance Allowance?

No, you do not have to be registered as blind (severely sight impaired) or partially sighted (sight impaired) to claim Attendance Allowance. It is how your sight affects your daily living that counts. Registration can provide evidence of how serious your sight problem is. If your sight problem is making your life

difficult, it is worth thinking about getting registered. This helps to make sure that you don't miss out on other help you can get.

If you are not registered, but you have other health conditions, collecting official evidence to reinforce your claim is important, such as hospital, GP letters and prescription lists. Ideally, care throughout the day or continual supervision to avoid substantial danger to yourself or others must be required for 6 months before qualifying for Attendance Allowance.

How much is Attendance Allowance worth?

If your claim for Attendance Allowance is successful, you will receive one of two weekly rates, depending on how much care you need:

- A low rate of £68.10
- A high rate of £101.75

The person making the decision on your claim will take into consideration the care you need during the day, during the night, and how often you need that care. The RNIB has a factsheet that explains more about this. We can also send these out to you in a format that suits.

How to claim Attendance Allowance.

If you live in England, Scotland or Wales then you can request a claim form by calling the Department for Work and Pensions' Attendance Allowance Helpline on **0800 731 0122** (textphone **0800 731 0317**) Monday to Friday 8am to 5pm. You can ask them for help in filling out the form. You can also download the claim forms through the government website.

Here at Southend in Sight, we suggest calling the DWP and requesting the forms in large print. If your claim is successful, it will be backdated to the initial request for the form. We offer a form filling service with volunteers who have a wealth of experience in doing this. They can also help and advise on applying for Blue Badges, disabled Railcards, bus passes and other benefits.

Don't forget, we also offer IT support and can help you get online to manage your own finances independently. For more information or to book an appointment for our services, please call us on **01702 34 21 31**. We are here to help!

World Sight Day 2023

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

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. This year Southend in Sight went all out to mark the occasion with 7 members of staff attending and organising no less than 5 events throughout the day.

Our first event involved us joining the Southend Lions Club on a walk around the town's Marks & Spencer store with the local Mayor for the morning. Southend City Mayor Stephen Habermel was blindfolded and guided around the store with the help of Southend in Sight's CEO, Lucy Martin, to raise awareness of the challenges faced every day by those living with sight loss. The Mayor was encouraged to touch and feel groceries and clothes while Lucy described the items to him, and to even negotiate a lift and payment at the till.



Lucy says: "We are so pleased that the Mayor was such a good sport and allowed himself to be blindfolded, as we know how disorientating it can be at first. The experience has enabled Councillor Habermel to 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".

The photo shows from left to right the Lady Mayoress, Southend Lion President David Tame, The Mayor blindfolded, M & S Deputy Manager Mitch and CEO Lucy Martin.



On the same morning, our Community Coordinator Liz attended an eye health awareness event at Circle Health Clinic, chatting to patients about the importance of looking after your eyes.

Later on that morning, Community Engagement Officer Georgie delivered a sight loss awareness training session for staff at Indirock, the climbing and bouldering wall activity centre in Southend. The photo to the left shows Indirock staff trying out the simulation specs and experiencing eye conditions for themselves. They were keen to participate as later on that month we had an event for children and young people booked in and they

wanted to make sure they took any necessary adaptations on board.



In the afternoon, Sight Loss Advisor Coralie joined our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer Tracey at Southend Eye Clinic for a training session with NHS staff. Simulation specs were tried and tested (as shown in the photo with NHS staff in their blue scrubs), patients talked about their experiences of living with sight loss and staff from Southend City Council were on hand to talk about the sensory services available.

And last but not least, Community Coordinator Liz finished the day with an open evening at our Centre for local opticians. Staff were on hand to chat about the support we provide and in particular to demonstrate the type of equipment we can offer to those with deteriorating eye sight. It was a great opportunity to catch up with the opticians we know and to make some new acquaintances, while raising awareness of sight loss.

If you are a member of a local group or club and would like Southend in Sight to deliver a talk about our work or sight loss awareness training, please contact our office on **01702 34 21 31**.

Blind Veteran Roy

An interview with and poem by Roy Pritchard.

We are pleased to say that following our advertisement for new members in our last issue, our choir numbers have swelled. One of those who recently joined us is Roy Pritchard, and we think you will agree he is quite a character...

After losing his sight in 2019, Roy contacted Blind Veterans and was encouraged to join their choir at the Colchester Barracks Church. The pandemic in 2020 soon put a stop to his new found hobby.

Roy then met with our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer Tracey at Southend Hospital last year and she gave him advice and information on what support is available.

He was referred to the Southend Sensory Team for a home assessment and was given some equipment and tech advice from our volunteers to help him make the best use of his phone and tablet.



Roy has always liked crosswords and he likes to keep his brain active. To fill this gap, he started writing poetry, and found he had quite a talent for it. In fact, he has a few poems in his repertoire, which he memorises.

Roy (pictured left wearing his poppy with pride) has recently joined the Southend in Sight choir (Insight Singers) and has fitted right in. He learns the songs using his Alexa, playing them on repeat until he knows the words and tune. Now Roy is trying his hand at writing his own song for the choir – we can't wait to hear it.

In the meantime, we have printed one of his poems to share with you all.

I'm 80 years old and I'm blind,

I feel like the world has left me behind.

They take me to a room and show me to a chair, And they leave me there.

What do I do if I want the loo?

Do I say hello, excuse me, yoo-hoo?

Or do I raise my hand, like when I was a lad?

Please come and help me, I want to go bad!

Someone might say, can I help you mate?

Take me to the loo before it's too late.

I go to the loo and do my business, Wash my hands as dry as a bone.

I open the door, my help has gone home!

No-one knows my world is black, I use my stick to find my way back.

Someone says, are you ok?

I say, show me to a chair.

And they put me in a chair, And they leave me there.

I never realised how lonely it could be in a crowded room.

I smiled at someone, but I don't know to whom.

I say hello, but no-one's there, Just me, sitting on my chair.

So, if you see someone sitting alone, Put away your mobile phone.

Come and say hello, are you ok?

You might just have made someone's day.

Southend in Sight – your local sight loss charity.

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Our Contact Details:

Telephone: 01702 342131

Email: info@southendinsight.org.uk

Website: www.southendinsight.org.uk

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- Excellence
- Community
- Empowerment
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Your vision is our vision

