

Welcome to our Spring edition of “In Touch”. In this issue we celebrate our staff and our volunteers, and offer some useful information about services that exist to help blind and partially sighted people continue living independent and fulfilling lives.

We recently reviewed our services for 2023, detailing all the support we have offered throughout the year. In our Centre, over 1500 sessions of support took place with telephone advice, a booked appointment or a drop-in session, benefitting a total of 483 local blind and partially sighted people. 102 tech sessions were held and 37 sessions for form filling: 200 new people came to us for support during 2023.

The social activities we offer have expanded and now include a choir, line dancing, talking book club and Fun Friday as well as the regular coffee mornings and weekly bowling. A total of 117 activities took place in 2023 for children, young people, working age and older people, with 166 local people benefitting.

Our “Talk and Support” service is still going strong with 13 volunteers supporting staff in making regular calls to local visually impaired people. In 2023, 1,971 calls were made to 116 individuals.

Our hospital service, which is managed by our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer, offers emotional and practical support at the point of diagnosis. 1,059 patients were supported at Southend Hospital Eye Clinic during 2023 through 1,757 sessions, with 407 Certificates of Visual Impairment being issued.



staff gathered together at our volunteer “thank you” celebration.

CEO Lucy Martin says: “I am so proud of our team of staff and volunteers here at Southend in Sight, who work so hard to fulfil our mission to support anyone living locally with sight loss, whatever their age and need.” The photo left shows volunteers and

# Team Talk

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager



As our front page contains lots of stats about our service, the team decided to provide a quick news update on their particular areas.

The photo left shows staff at a recent meeting, where CEO Lucy provided breakfast to thank the team for their continued hard work.

The Sight Loss Advice team have booked our annual exhibition for Wednesday 30 October 2024 from 10am to 2pm. It will be held once again at the Ekco Club in Southend, as the relaxed atmosphere seemed to suit both exhibitors and visitors alike. Save the date in your diaries!

They have also asked if anyone has any magnifiers that they no longer use, to donate them to us if possible please. We continue to offer second hand equipment at our Centre, but are particularly short of magnifiers. Please call the office if you come across any items that you think would be suitable to donate for us to pass on to others.

The Talk and Support team are focussed on continuing to offer regular phone calls to local visually impaired people. However, they are also running 2 projects alongside their work, offering help and support on energy safety and checking whether people are receiving the benefits they are entitled to. If you haven't already spoken to Dean, you may well be on his list to call in the coming months as he aims to reach everyone.

Our Community Engagement Officer is as busy as ever! This year, we are focussed on providing social meet ups for children and young people and our working age groups. We have already started with a pizza night in our Centre, one in December and one in February, both of which were well attended. There are plans afoot for some trips out when the weather improves.



Local visually impaired children and their families enjoyed an “Animal Encounter” during the recent February half term. They were allowed to pet snakes (yikes), stroke chinchillas, sit hedgehogs on their laps and generally get up close and personal with a variety of unusual animals.

And we couldn’t resist featuring a photo from our December Christmas party where over 60 people enjoyed a turkey dinner and live music. The photo left shows one of Santa’s elves hugging regular coffee morning attendee Rose at the event.

Our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer Tracey has seen more patients than ever in the last year. She currently actions 99% of all Certificates of Visual Impairment at Southend. This is fantastic news for us as it helps to prevent patients from slipping through the net.

Tracey continues to receive referrals from all clinicians, including outside of Ophthalmology, the Stroke Team and Sensory Teams. She is particularly busy on Mondays, when the Low Vision Clinic is held at Southend Hospital!

If you would like to talk to any of the team about the services we offer, please call our office on **01702 34 21 31**. You will find details on our social activities on the separate yellow flier in this newsletter.

## **RNIB News**

We have some details from the RNIB about an online discussion group for any blind and partially sighted adults who would like to talk about how sight loss has impacted their social relationships. They will be discussing your experiences with family and friends, romantic relationships, peers and your local community.

The next session takes place on **Wednesday 13 & 27 March from 2pm to 4:15pm** online via Teams. Don’t worry, the RNIB can dial you into the call if needed. If you are interested in taking part and joining in the discussion, please call the **RNIB Helpline** on **0303 123 9999** and ask to sign up to the Voice of the Customer Focus Groups.

# Talking Books

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

Many of the people we support say that one of the activities they miss the most when their sight deteriorates is reading a book. Talking books may not suit everyone, but just imagine continuing to enjoy being immersed in a murder mystery, a crime thriller or a romance.

There are so many more ways to enjoy the written word now, with everyone listening to podcasts, famous actors recording books and easier access to digital downloads, many of which are free.

The most popular service, which has been running for over 80 years, is the **RNIB Talking Books**. The service is free and offers access to over 25,000 fiction and non-fiction books for adults and children with a wide range of titles and different formats.

- You can choose to receive your books on **DAISY CD** (one book per disc) or **USB stick** (three books per stick) depending on your personal taste.
- Talking Books are also available by **digital download**.
- You can receive and return your books free of charge, with no limit on how many you can borrow throughout the month or year.
- When you sign up, you can choose the type of books you like by category or author, so that new or next book suggestions can be tailored to you personally.
- You can browse the online catalogue and choose your books yourself.

To sign up to RNIB Talking Books for free please call **0303 123 9999** or email: **helpline@rnib.org.uk**

The other main service is **CALIBRE**. Calibre Audio is free to join for everyone who has a print disability. Their digital library service includes:

- Unlimited borrowing of over 11,500 unabridged audiobooks with more than 700 new books added each year.
- Over 3,000 audiobooks specifically for children and young people.
- Available on streaming, download, memory stick and MP3 CD.

- Free postage and no fines for late or lost audiobooks.
- Manage your account online or by phone.

To sign up to the Calibre Talking Book Service, please call: **01296 432 339**.

## Digital Downloads

Once you are registered with a reading service, you may prefer to download your books digitally onto your Smartphone, tablet, Alexa or desktop computer. This is a great way to continue listening while you are travelling, with no wi-fi required when you are on the move.

Here at Southend in Sight we have some easy to follow large print instructions available on how to download your book. These can be sent out to you via email or by post.

We can also arrange for a tech appointment at our Centre where we can demonstrate in person and help set you up so you are ready to start listening in your preferred format. Please call our friendly team on **01702 34 21 31** for help.



Our own Talking Book Club has grown with some new members joining, meeting every month to enjoy and discuss their latest audible find. They are pictured left on their first anniversary.

Their favourite book so far (a recommendation to get you all started) is: **A Man Called Ove** by **Fredrik Backman**.

This is available to order from the RNIB Talking Books library.  
Happy listening everyone!

# Priority Services Register

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

We are working in partnership with the energy supplier CADENT and participating in their “Centres for Warmth” initiative. As part of this project, we are talking to the people we support about the benefits of signing up to the Priority Services Register (PSR).

The Priority Services Register (PSR) helps gas, electricity and water companies look after customers who have additional communication, access or safety needs. It’s free and easy to join and gives extra support to those who need it, even in the unlikely event of a power cut, gas or water supply interruption.

## **How does it work?**

Depending on your circumstances, being on the PSR gives you access to a variety of services, for example:

- Alternative facilities for cooking and heating in a power emergency.
- Bills and information from your energy company in a different format.
- A “Knock and Wait” service, making home visits more convenient and easier, allowing you extra time to get to the door. A password can also be set up.
- If it helps, you can also nominate a carer, family member or friend to be contacted in an emergency on your behalf.

## **Who can register?**

The PSR is available to people who:

- Have a chronic or serious illness.
- Are dependent on medical equipment including oxygen.
- Have poor mobility, sight, hearing, smell or speech difficulties.
- Are not able to communicate in English.
- Would benefit from extra support in the event of an interruption in their energy supply as they have young families with children under 5 or are of pensionable age.

This means that anyone reading or listening to this newsletter with a sight impairment is eligible to sign up.

## How can I register?

It's really easy to join and is free of charge. All you have to do is:

- Contact your energy supplier and ask to be added to the PSR.
- Alternative facilities for cooking and heating in a power emergency. You can go online and register yourself at: [www.thepsr.co.uk](http://www.thepsr.co.uk).
- Alternative facilities for cooking and heating in a power emergency. You can call Southend in Sight and we will help sign you up.

If you are a dual fuel customer, meaning that one company provides both your electricity and your gas, then you only need to register once. If you have two separate suppliers for your gas and electricity, it is recommended that you register with both companies.

## What happens after?

Once registered, you will be sent a welcome pack by your energy supplier which will include a number to call if you have any questions.

If you need someone to register on your behalf, they will need to contact your supplier and explain your situation. They will want to speak to you to gain consent.

## What about my data?

With your consent, your suppliers will keep and share your details across the energy industry, but they will NOT be used for general marketing purposes. In the event of an emergency, your details may also be shared with trusted charities such as the Red Cross.



## Other Benefits.

As part of the CADENT project, our staff have received training on energy saving initiatives in the home and CO2 safety. If you would like more information on these, including a free gas safety check for those who qualify and free CO2 monitors (pictured left), please call the team on **01702 34 21 31**.

# Should I be registered?

## Information from the RNIB website.

We often ask people who are new to our services if they are “registered”. There is sometimes confusion over what we mean by this, so we have put together the following information to (hopefully) explain everything.

## What is registration?

“Registration” simply means being on your local social service’s register of people who are either severely sight impaired (blind) or sight impaired (partially sighted). It’s voluntary and is completely confidential and your details won’t be shared. This is separate to being “registered” with your GP or other NHS services.

## How do I get registered?

### Step one: getting a referral to an eye specialist.

If you are having problems with your sight, visit a high street optician (an optometrist) or your GP for an initial check-up. If necessary, they will then refer you to your local eye clinic for an appointment.

At your appointment in the eye clinic, an eye specialist (called an ophthalmologist) will examine the health of your eyes and your eyesight.

### Step two: the ophthalmologist decides if you can be certified.

Your eye specialist will measure how good you are at seeing detail at a distance (your visual acuity) and how much you can see from the side of your eye when you’re looking straight ahead (your field of vision).

If your ophthalmologist judges that you can be certified, they will complete an official certificate with the results of your eye examination, as well as information about your circumstances.

In England and Wales this certificate is called the Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI).



### **Step three: registration with your local social services.**

After receiving a copy of your certificate, your local social services team should contact you to ask if you wish to be included on its register of blind and partially sighted people. If you say “yes” then you become registered.

If you choose not to be registered, you can still get support from social services to help you remain independent.

### **What happens after you're registered?**

Social services should contact you to discuss carrying out a needs assessment, also known as a Social Care and Rehabilitation Assessment. The aim of this assessment is for social services to find out what help and advice you need to remain independent. For example, this could include help with everyday tasks such as cleaning and cooking, keeping in touch with friends and family, or with transport.

### **The advantages of registering.**

There are some very significant advantages to getting registered. Firstly, it can make life more affordable by enabling you to claim a wide range of concessions. These could include a half-price TV Licence, help with NHS costs, help with your Council Tax bill, and tax allowances, leisure discounts and free public transport. Which concessions you are entitled to depends on whether you are registered as severely sight impaired or sight impaired.

Although being registered does not automatically entitle you to any particular welfare benefits, it does often make it easier for you to claim some of them. Your registration confirms your sight loss and helps as evidence in your claim.

Your local council will often give you a registration card (yellow) that proves your registration status. Having this can help to prove your entitlement to concessions, including when you're visiting places of interest.

If you are unsure whether you have a CVI or not, please call your GP in the first instance as they should have a copy. If you would like further information on becoming registered and what a Certificate of Visual Impairment means, please call our offices on **01702 34 21 31**.

# Volunteer Recognition

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

We celebrated with our volunteers in December, thanking them for their continued and unwavering support over the last year. At the party, awards were given to: Anne Hennessey, Gary England and Jean Jacobi for 5 years, to Cathy Blunt for 10 years and to Keith Dowson and Sue Wright for 15 long years of service to the charity.

CEO Lucy Martin says: “Our charity was started by volunteers and we still have a strong cohort today, supporting us in our work, at our charity shop and in the community. We really would not be able to offer the services that we do without their help and we thank them for their continued support.”



Helping to give out the awards, former Mayor, Rotarian and supporter of Southend in Sight Ron Price said: “I am proud to be involved with such a fantastic local charity. The volunteers really do help to create such a warm and welcoming atmosphere at every activity and I know that people living

locally with sight loss appreciate everything that Southend in Sight has to offer them”. The photo above shows Jean, Lucy, Chairman Russell, Cathy, Ron and Keith at the celebrations.

Following a recruitment drive, we have welcomed some new volunteers to our shop, our Centre, our activities and to our Talk and Support service, including a younger cohort for work experience and Duke of Edinburgh volunteering. Like all our volunteers, our new faces are learning and working together to provide a welcoming and supportive environment for all to enjoy.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank long standing volunteer Heidi Browne for 12 years of service to the charity. While Heidi is known mostly by our customers in the charity shop, she has also supported our visually impaired volunteers in the centre and has been known to help us over the years at our fundraising events and collections too.



Heidi has decided to step away from regular volunteering, but can't bear to say "auf wiedersehen" for good: she will be returning on an ad hoc basis.

It didn't stop us making a fuss of her on her last official day in the shop.

She is pictured left receiving flowers from staff and her Thursday shift buddies!

We sadly say goodbye to our former volunteer and trustee Barbara Armitage, who passed away in November last year. Barbara has been involved with our charity since the mid 70s and her husband John, when he was Mayor, chose us as his charity back in 1989.

Barbara has worked tirelessly for the community since she moved to the Southend area in the 1950's. She worked nearly her entire life in government service as a social worker for Southend and Essex County Councils. Barbara was on many local committees until her ill health, at the age of 90, led her to step down. She was instrumental in the opening of the Pier Museum and ran the Belfair's Residence Association as the chair since 1973. She has been an active member of Southend Older People's Assembly and The Southend Area Bus User Group and for many years has helped with the Welfare for the Blind campaigns.



Barbara was an active member of our local community and will be remembered fondly by many. The photo left shows Barbara with our CEO Lucy a few years ago at the launch of the Mayor's Charity Fund.

## **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**

