

Welcome to our Summer edition of “In Touch”. With the warmer weather promising to make an entrance, we are in a celebratory mood in this issue. There is much to shout about, as we focus on some local inspirational people.

We are pleased to announce that Southend in Sight’s former Chair of Trustees, David Hurst, has recently been appointed as the High Sheriff of Essex. During his year in office, David will be travelling around the county, visiting charities and promoting the work that they do. We wish David every success in his new role, knowing that of course he will continue to support his (favourite) local charity in Southend!

Our current Chairman, Russell Cable, is also making a name for himself. Russell is the Database Manager for Thomas Pocklington Trust, a charity for blind and partially sighted people, based in London. He was recently filmed at work for a short documentary talking about his approach to and experience of work as a visually impaired person. He used a phrase which has stuck with us all: “Don’t let your eyes become what you are, make them who you are”.



Russell, pictured left at a recent trustees’ meeting, credits his time volunteering and working with Southend in Sight as the springboard for his new career. The positive and invaluable experience he gained with us has not only helped him in the workplace but also in his voluntary role as our Chairman.

He knows first hand how important it is for anyone living with sight loss to be given opportunities, to be given choices and to strive for what they know they can achieve in life.

This is something we strongly believe in at our charity.

# Team Talk

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

Our Centre team are as busy as ever offering telephone and in person advice and support to anyone coming to us for help. In April alone, they helped 77 individuals.

With the warmer weather, we are also welcoming more people to our regular Wednesday morning drop-in sessions with visually impaired volunteers Jackie and Maria.

Although our tech team are very popular, we do offer weekly appointments for both Apple and Android products, so do please get in touch if you need help with your phone, tablet or laptop.



And please remember our form-filling service. We are here to advise on the benefits you may be entitled to receive, and our volunteers David, Carol and Barbara can all help make sure you have personalised advice with your application.

Carol and David are featured here in the photo to the left, with Centre Manager Coralie.

We must also remind you about our annual exhibition – this is taking place on Wednesday 30 October from 10am to 2pm at The Ekco Club again. We are busy pinning down the suppliers to attend, but we have been promised that we will be able to test a talking air fryer – very exciting!

Our Community Engagement Officer Georgie is rarely seen in the office these days, as she is out and about running our coffee mornings, Fun Fridays, choir, line dancing and talking book club. These well established social activities provide regular opportunities for local people living with sight loss and their families and carers to meet up with others in a similar situation to their own.

We also continue to run our Talk and Support service, offering regular calls to over 80 people.

Georgie is currently planning activities for children, young adults and working age people. There are horse riding sessions booked for both of these groups and a walk over the O2 in London. The children now have a youth group every other month at the soft play centre, Kids Kingdom. We are so pleased to be able to offer all our age groups and their families the chance to meet up socially.



Our regular Thursday bowling at CJs in Hockley, organised by Anne Morris, has attracted some newcomers over the past few months. Our monthly awards have also proved very popular leading to some friendly rivalry between the bowlers. Our latest winner of the “most improved VIP” is Ted, who is pictured left clutching his gold trophy. He is living proof at the grand old age of 91 that experiencing sight loss does not need to be a barrier to enjoying life to the full!

Over the last few months, we have been working on a project with the local arts and creative organisation “Metal”. They have created an online gallery with audio description of the people of Southend in Sight – this includes some of the readers of and listeners to this very newsletter, staff, Trustees, volunteers, supporters and the wider family network. We are excited to be presented with the finished product and will circulate how you can access the online gallery in our next edition.

Our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer Tracey continues in her work at the hospital, offering support with certification and helping people with their next steps. Southend Hospital is no different to anywhere around the country facing challenges around long waiting lists and longer gaps between appointments. You can find out about some of the ways the local healthcare services are trying to address these issues on page 5.

For advice, support and information on any of the services and activities we offer, please call our office on **01702 34 21 31** to speak to a member of the team.

# Hospital Links

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

Good news! Our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer, Tracey Meddle, has been nominated for a “Shine Award” in the Patient Champion category by her colleagues at Southend Hospital. We have long thought that Tracey is a patient champion but now her work with the Eye Clinic is being recognised by her peers.

Here is what the hospital staff said about her: “Tracey always goes above and beyond the call of duty. She always has a smile on her face and takes time to get to know the patients she deals with. She is compassionate and good at dealing with vulnerable patients, always taking the time to discuss their concerns”.



The Shine Awards celebrate the extraordinary work of staff across the Mid and South Essex NHS Trust and the difference they make to people who use their services every day. A total of 608 nominations were submitted in this year’s awards, so to even make the short list is a fantastic achievement. We are very proud of Tracey, pictured left, and all the support she offers to people using the Eye Clinic at Southend Hospital. We are sure you will agree that Tracey

deserves her nomination, whatever the outcome.

## **Help shape health and social care services in Southend.**

Have you recently visited your GP, local hospital, or used any health and care services in Southend? Do you have some positive feedback to give, or have some ideas of how things can improve? If so, Healthwatch Southend want to hear from you:

Healthwatch Southend are your local health and social care champion. They have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care for all of us.



They are completely independent, impartial, and anything you say is confidential. Their service is free, simple to use, and can make a real difference to you and your families. As they're not part of the NHS or the council, they can speak freely on your behalf and pass on any feedback you give them.

Owen Richards, Chief Officer at Healthwatch Southend said: "We're here to bring your voice to the table and challenge decision makers where we think people's needs are not being met.

"One project we've been working on recently is around unpaid carers and their experience of visiting their GP. We spoke to several unpaid carers in and around Southend and listened to their feedback. We found that there's gaps when it comes to carers registering as such with their practice and that often carers' assessments aren't taking place when they should. We've shared our findings with NHS leaders in Mid and South Essex and will wait to hear what actions they will take from our report.

We couldn't do the work we do without hearing from local people, so if you have any comments, concerns or feedback, please get in touch."

Healthwatch want to listen to your stories, or to help if you just need some information or advice. You can reach them at:

Telephone: **01702 416 320**

Email: **[info@healthwatchsouthend.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchsouthend.co.uk)**

Website: **[www.healthwatchsouthend.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchsouthend.co.uk)**

### **Ophthalmology Diagnostic Hub.**

Patients who have been waiting for appointments to diagnose and treat blinding eye conditions including glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration are now offered an appointment at the new state of the art Ophthalmology Diagnostic Hub in Orsett Hospital.

Mid and South Essex NHS Foundation Trust has introduced these new clinics to allow more patients to be seen, reduce the time appointments take and improve the patient experience.

Patients have all their tests and diagnostics done in one go by a technician or nurse. If they have any concerns related to their eye condition these are fed back to the doctors reviewing their results. Patients are contacted by the reviewing doctor by letter or phone and informed of their findings and any change to treatment.

A second hub is planned to open this summer in South Woodham Ferrers, which will help people in mid and south Essex to get faster appointments.

# Energy Saving Tips

## Extracts from the RNIB website.

As part of our work with the CADENT energy project, we are listing a few energy saving tips that might help you around the home.

### **1. Choose energy-efficient light bulbs and lighting solutions.**

If you are living with sight loss, it is important that you don't turn off the lights when you need them. However, you can choose energy efficient bulbs such as L.E.Ds to save energy. They last five times longer than traditional bulbs, so while they may be more expensive to buy, they could help you save money in the long run. You might want to replace your old bulbs only when they've burned out or in the spaces where you spend most of your time. Before you buy new bulbs, check that they are compatible with your current light fittings.

### **2. Take regular meter readings.**

Taking regular, accurate meter readings could help you save money on your energy bill. It's also worth taking a meter reading before your energy tariff or rate is due to change, so you can take advantage of any savings. Living with sight loss can make it harder to read your meter, particularly if it's an older style of meter or in a difficult-to-reach spot. If your meter isn't accessible, it's worth asking your energy provider to install a smart meter, if you would like one, or send someone out to read your meter so your bills are accurate.

### **3. Keep on top of your energy use with a smart meter and accessible in-home display (AIHD).**

A smart meter sends accurate, automatic meter-readings to your supplier, so your bills reflect your energy usage. It also means you don't have to worry about accessing and reading your meter.

If you find it hard to access the digital display or controls on your smart meter, an accessible in-home display (AIHD) could help. An AIHD works with your smart meter to help you manage how much energy you use. They have large, tactile buttons, a high-contrast display, and a text-to-speech function. Please contact your supplier directly to request an AIHD.

### **4. Request bills in your preferred format.**

Your energy provider must give you your bill in your preferred format (such as braille, large print, or audio) if you request it. You'll need to contact your provider directly to receive your bills in an alternative format.

## **5. Unplug appliances if you don't use them often.**

Many people living with sight loss use assistive technology at home to stay independent. Some of these devices may need to be left plugged in, such as your internet modem and voice assistant (Alexa). However, unplugging any electronic appliances on standby that are not often used could save you money on your electricity bill.

## **6. Make your home a draught-free zone.**

Draught-proofing is a cheap, effective way to keep your home warmer and save money on your energy bill. Households could save up to £45 a year making a few small changes, such as draught proofing around windows and doors and closing curtains.

## **7. Check if you're entitled to help with major energy saving changes.**

Although you can reduce energy loss with some small changes, your home might benefit from larger improvements to make it more energy efficient. For example, insulating your home is one of the most cost-effective ways to reduce energy lost through your roof, walls, and flooring. Adding insulation and making other improvements can be expensive, but there are grants available to help with the cost of: installing insulation, upgrading your central heating, replacing or repairing your old boiler.

For information and advice about support in your area, please contact the RNIB energy advisers on: **0303 123 999** (please select option 3) or email: **helpline@rnib.org.uk**

## **8. Save time and energy with Bumpons.**

Bumpons are raised tactile dots you can stick on to almost anything around your home or office to make it easier to identify. You can use them to mark energy-efficient settings on different appliances, to help manage how much energy you use. For example, you could add a bumpon to your preferred temperature setting for your heating or to mark the 30 degree wash cycle on your machine.

If you are worried about the cost of energy, here at Southend in Sight we can also help you with advice on benefits and financial support you may be entitled to. Please call us on **01702 34 21 31** to book an appointment.

# Here comes the sun...

## Information from the RNIB Website.

Now that summer is on its way, we thought it would be timely to remind you all about the importance of protecting your eyes from the sun.

As many of you know, some eye conditions, like age-related macular degeneration (AMD), or cataracts, can increase your sensitivity to light. Light sensitivity can cause a lot of discomfort and reduce your sight further. On some days you may find it hard to go out in daylight at all. Here are our tips on getting the right sunglasses to relieve sensitivity to light.

## Regular sunglasses won't cut it.

Managing the effects of bright light can be tricky, you must find the balance between reducing sensitivity while still getting enough light to make the most of your vision.

Regular sunglasses cut the amount of light entering the eye, but if you have low vision this could also reduce your sight. Furthermore, they may not give the relief from glare symptoms that you require.

For some people cutting down on the light level entering the eye helps; for others, cutting out certain ranges of light colour helps more. The best combination varies from person to person and there is no current evidence to say which colour is best for eye conditions. It's always best to try a wide range to see what works for you, something we can offer here at our Centre at Southend in Sight.

## Experiment with different light conditions.

It's best to try sunglasses on in the same environment that you suffer the symptoms. For example, if you find sunny days most difficult, try glasses out on a bright day or inside a supermarket with bright strip lighting. If you have problems adapting to changes between lighting conditions, try them on both outside and indoors to see the difference.

You may find that different filters work better for you in different situations. Some people prefer to have two different pairs: one with a dark tint for sunny days and one with a lighter tint for less bright days. Alternatively, some find photochromic



lenses helpful. These lenses change with the light conditions and do so slowly to give plenty of time to adjust.

## Get fitted!

A well-fitting frame should sit close to your face comfortably. Eye protection designed for people with sight loss offers more coverage than a standard pair of sunglasses, with top panels and wider arms to block light entering the eye.

Known as “wraparound frames”, they often look like sports sunglasses and are designed to protect the eyes from light coming from different directions. Most of the glare people experience comes from above, so some people find that wearing these as well as a hat with a brim really helps.

You can also adapt other glasses to help protect your eyes such as larger “fit-over” frames, which can be worn over a pair of prescription spectacles. Some sports sunglasses can be adapted with clip-in lenses which fit inside.

## Check for UVA and UVB protection.

All sunglasses sold in the UK should have ultra-violet (UV) filter as standard that will also protect your eyes from the harmful UV rays of the sun. These should have a CE mark (European Conformity) and some may have a UV400 mark.

However, take caution when buying abroad. Even in the UK it’s not always clear whether a pair of lenses is correct to the markings on their frame. To be safe, only buy from responsible stockists. It’s also important to be aware that darkness of a lenses’ tint has no bearing on how much protection from UV they give.



Although UV filters don’t help with glare, it’s important to protect your eyes from the sun as there is evidence that high exposure to UVA and UVB are risk factors for the development of cataracts. The best lenses will have protection against both UVA and UVB light.

If you would like to book an appointment with our sight loss team to try out our range of glare glasses (some of which are pictured left), please call our office on **01702 34 21 31**.

# Meet our intern

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

As a sight loss charity, we want to offer work opportunities to local blind and partially sighted people. Earlier this year, we made the decision to join the Thomas Pocklington Trust's "Get Set Progress" scheme and recruit an intern. The idea is that we employ a visually impaired person for 9 months in a role that allows them to gain confidence, develop new skills and helps prepare them for a potential new job.

Kirsty is registered as partially sighted and has Stargadt's disease. She has been with us for a few months now and has settled into our team well, spending her time meeting staff, volunteers and of course the people we support.

She has also been getting to grips with all the assistive technology that is available to her. Kirsty is featured in the photo below showing Rochford Rotary Club member and Southend in Sight Trustee Jeremy Davenport her touch screen laptop, demonstrating how she is able to enlarge text.



Kirsty says of her new role: The first two months of my internship at Southend in Sight have been amazing. Everyone has been so welcoming and supportive, which has really helped me find my feet and settle in. The team's specialist knowledge of living and working with sight loss has been a revelation. From advising on assistive technology for my role to finding inclusive ways of working together, I couldn't ask for more. I've met so many amazing members and volunteers and learned so much already.

I am so grateful for this life changing opportunity and delighted to be part of the fantastic work Southend in Sight does.

# Football Heroes

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

We have some new supporters! White Ensign under 8's Reds are a newly formed local grass-roots football team. They train at Priory Park, with their home games being played at Shoebury Park.

They wanted to help support a local charity, as well as provide a team bonding experience for everyone involved. The red shirts worn by the team are sponsored by Lasersight, who are also supporting our charity.

The team set a challenge for the boys and their supporters to walk from Chalkwell Park to Shoebury Common, along the seafront, a route that is just under 5 miles, with the aim of raising some money for Southend in Sight.



Luckily, the weather was in their favour over the early bank holiday in May and the boys completed the challenge with very few complaints. They collected money in buckets along the way too, all to add to their fundraising target. Cakes and refreshments were on hand at the end to aid their recovery.

We are pleased to say that the boys, pictured above in their red shirts, with the goalkeeper in fluorescent kit, raised £801 from online donations. Match funding from the Manager's company has also been offered, meaning a total of just over £1600.

In the next few weeks, we will be visiting the boys at their training session to present each of them with a certificate, thanking them for all their efforts in raising money for us. Our heartfelt thanks to the boys and their families for their organisation, encouragement and undertaking of this challenge – what an achievement!

## **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**

