

Welcome to our Spring edition of In Touch. 2024 seems a long time ago now, but we wanted to share our stats with you for last year. We are sure you will agree that the Southend in Sight team have worked hard to support as many local blind and partially sighted people as they can.

At our Centre on Hamlet Court Road, we helped 477 individuals in 1,433 sessions of support. This includes 104 “tech” and 41 form filling appointments.

We held 134 activity sessions last year. This includes our coffee mornings, Fun Fridays, choir, talking book club, line dancing, weekly term time bowling and one-off events for children and adults of all ages. We also supported 114 local blind and partially sighted people with a regular wellbeing call.

And last but not least, our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer Tracey supported 1,096 patients with 1,799 sessions of support at Southend Hospital.

CEO Lucy Martin says: “Every year I am so impressed by my team of staff and volunteers and the work they carry out supporting local visually impaired people in the community. I know that the personalised service we are

providing is much appreciated and this spurs us all on to continue to do our best in 2025”.

The photo left shows volunteers Jackie (left) and Maria (right) at a Wednesday drop-in session at our Centre with staff members Georgie, Coralie and Lucy.



For an exciting update on our charity, please turn to page 2!

# Team Talk

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

As mentioned in previous newsletters, the charity has made the decision to sell the building at 117 Hamlet Court Road and to relocate frontline services.

We are happy to inform you that we are moving to central Southend from April/May to the SAVS (Southend Association of Voluntary Services) building on Alexandra Street. We are renting a large, open, fully accessible space on the ground floor, with two further offices upstairs for staff.

While this may not be our forever home, it does give us the opportunity to offer an enhanced service with private space for consultations and to try out a few new ideas. It's an exciting time for the charity, and we hope you will all pop in to find out for yourself, once we have a moving in date. We will, of course, let you know the finer details when all is confirmed.

In the meantime, our sight loss advice continues, with our Centre Manager Coralie at the helm. It has been a busy start to the year, with a flurry of appointments for equipment, IT and form filling. We are a little short staffed at the moment, so please do bear with us if we take longer than usual to get back to you.

As well as magnifiers, lighting and equipment for the home, we have examples of all sorts of electronic readers that can make a difference to someone who would like to independently read their own post or newspapers. And, a reminder about talking books – there is a whole library out there with new authors, read by some fantastic actors, that can really bring a story to life – go on, give it a try! We can assist you in signing up for this free service and explain how it works.

Our social calendar remains full, with activities on offer every week, from coffee mornings to choir, to line dancing, talking book club, Fun Fridays and bowling – our enclosed yellow sheet will tell you more.

Over the festive period, there were parties galore – 2 Christmas lunches and a pizza night!



We are very proud of our visually impaired bowlers. Anne and Gary are pictured in the photo left receiving their trophies for winning Division C and Division D in the British Blind Sport Pairs Finals 2024. Anne also won the most improved female bowler of the season.

Our bowlers meet every Thursday during term time at CJ's in Hockley to bowl and to chat. For more information on visually impaired bowling, please call Anne on **01702 34 21 31**.

Our visually impaired children and their families enjoyed the pantomime once again at the Cliffs Pavilion in December. They are also meeting bi-monthly at the soft play centre, Kids Kingdom, for fun and friendship.

We continue to offer help with form filling, especially when children reach 16 and they need to reapply for support. Please call our offices for more information.

We have a fun day planned for our working age group on Saturday 1st March to help Southend celebrate City Day, thanks to a grant from the Rosca Trust.

There will be events happening all over the city, as the local community comes together to enjoy all that is great about Southend. All will be revealed in our next newsletter!

For information on any of the services or activities we offer, or to reach our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer, Tracey Meddle, please call us on **01702 34 21 31**.

# Focus on Glaucoma

## Information from the Glaucoma UK website.

With World Glaucoma Week taking place from 9-15 March, we thought it would be timely for us to focus on an eye condition that affects many of those we support.

### What is Glaucoma?

Glaucoma is the name of the group of eye diseases that damage the optic nerve. The optic nerve transfers visual information from the eye to the brain and if it's damaged, it can result in sight loss. There are three main types of glaucoma: primary, secondary, and developmental (glaucoma in babies and children).

Glaucoma is a complicated disease and diagnosis is not always easy. Several different tests will be needed to confirm how and why damage to the optic nerve has occurred. In many cases, glaucoma is associated with high pressure within the eye.

### How do I know if I have Glaucoma?

In the early stages, glaucoma might not present any symptoms. Most commonly, glaucoma affects your off-centre, or peripheral vision first and this can go unnoticed initially because your central vision, which we use for reading, recognising faces, watching tv etc, remains good.

The only way to know if you are affected is to go for regular eye health checks at your optician/optometrist. They will carry out a few painless tests, including measuring your Intraocular pressure (IOP), to find out if you need referring to an ophthalmologist for further investigation.

### Who is at risk of Glaucoma?

**Age** – Glaucoma gets more common with age. It's uncommon below age 40 years, but rises from around 1 in 50 people over the age of 40 years to around 5 in 50 people over the age of 75 years.

**Family history** – Glaucoma often runs in families. As a rough guide, your brothers, sisters and children may be up to 10 times more likely to develop glaucoma. The actual risk depends on the type of glaucoma. Tell your relatives if you have glaucoma so that they can get tested for it.

**Ethnicity** – People of black African and Caribbean origin and people of Asian origin are more likely than people of European origin to develop glaucoma.

**Short/Long sight** – People with short sight (myopia) are more likely to have primary open angle glaucoma. People with long sight are more likely to have primary angle closure. High or low blood pressure – People with high blood pressure are more likely to have high eye pressure. Low blood pressure might cause too little blood to reach the optic nerve and damage it.

**Diabetes** – People with diabetes may be more likely to have glaucoma.

### **Treatments and Surgery for Glaucoma.**

**Eye Drops** – the most common treatment. There are different dispensers available to help you administer regular eye drops.

**Laser Surgery** – this treatment is used to decrease the amount of fluid in the eye.

**Trabeculectomy Surgery** – an operation that improves drainage of fluid out of the eye.

**Aqueous Shunt Implantation** – an implanted device to help improve the drainage of fluid from the eye.

**MIGS** – minimally invasive glaucoma surgery – this refers to a range of implants, devices and techniques to help reduce the pressure in the eye.

With the huge advances in diagnosis, monitoring and treatment, the vast majority of people with glaucoma in the UK will keep useful sight for life. If you or your family member are living with glaucoma and would like more information, please call **Glaucoma UK** on **01233 64 81 70** Monday to Friday between 9:30am and 5pm, or visit their website: [www.glaucoma.uk](http://www.glaucoma.uk)



# Healthy Tips

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

We all know there are benefits to eating a diet low in fat and rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Some nutrients are known to keep the eye healthy overall, and some have been found to help reduce the risk of eye diseases. Here is a short guide to eating healthily for your eyes.

## **Vitamin A.**

The best known eye healthy nutrient is Vitamin A, found in orange coloured vegetables and many fruits. Your retina needs plenty of Vitamin A to help turn light rays into the images we see and to stay moist enough to prevent dry eye. Good examples of vegetables with vitamin A are carrots, of course, but also sweet potatoes. For fruit, try cantaloupe and apricots.

## **Vitamin C.**

Vitamin C is critical to eye health. As an antioxidant, vitamin C helps protect the body from damage caused by some things we eat, unhealthy habits and environmental factors. Fried foods, tobacco smoke and the sun's rays produce molecules that can damage and kill cells. Vitamin C helps repair and grow new tissue cells. Good sources of Vitamin C include citrus fruits, such as oranges, tangerines, grapefruit and lemons, as well as peaches, red peppers, tomatoes and strawberries.

## **Vitamin E and Antioxidants.**

Another important antioxidant is vitamin E, which helps keep cells healthy. Vitamin E can be found in avocados, almonds and sunflower seeds. Lutein and zeaxanthin are antioxidants found in the pigments of leafy green vegetables and other brightly coloured foods. They are key to protecting the macular, the area of the eye that gives us our central, most detailed vision. Examples of foods rich in these nutrients are unsurprisingly kale and spinach, but also broccoli, peas and eggs.

## **Beans and zinc.**

The mineral zinc helps keep the retina healthy and can help protect your eyes from the damaging effects of light. All kinds of beans, including black-eyed peas, kidney beans and lima beans are good for eye health. Other foods high in zinc include lean red meat, poultry and fortified cereals.

# Local Council Support

## Information from the RNIB and local councils.

We work very closely with the Sensory Team at Southend City Council and with Essex Cares Ltd, making sure that everyone living locally with a visual impairment receives timely help and advice.

When Southend or Essex Council receive a copy of your CVI (Certificate of Visual Impairment), you will be invited to register as “sight impaired” or “severely sight impaired”. Whether you choose to be registered or not, your local council has a duty to offer you vision rehabilitation to help you remain as independent as possible. It will start with a phone call to assess your needs and may lead to a home visit. The type of support you may receive includes:

- Information about your eye condition, learning what it means for you and your family, and explaining the certification and registration process.
- Helping you come to terms with your condition and understanding the changes and adjustments you may need to live your life.
- Looking after yourself and learning new ways of completing tasks.
- Moving around your home safely and looking after it. This includes assessing your mobility needs, for example measures to reduce the risks of falls, the use of stairs, and advice on appropriate equipment and mobility aids. If needed, one to one training can be offered.
- Assessing your needs for daily living skills training, for example, any support or training you need to prepare meals, make drinks, use the oven or hob, iron or shop.
- You may be referred to the low vision service, where you will be assessed and the use of aids such as magnifiers and specialist lighting will be recommended.

If you would like to talk to your local council, you can speak to **ECL** for sensory services in Essex by calling: **03330 13 32 62**. For **Southend City Council Sensory Team**, please call: **01702 21 50 08** (Option 5, Option 1).

# Stars in our Eyes

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

Many of you will have been fascinated by Chris McCausland's participation in the BBC One show "Strictly" last year. From the very start of his journey, Chris, and his dance partner, Dianne, were unsure how he would learn the steps to a new dance every week, with no visual cues.



Chris, who has retinitis pigmentosa, found a way, using touch, his sense of timing (from years of performing comedy on stage), sheer hard work and his positive "can do" attitude. Staff and volunteers chatted every week about Chris and his

dancing, marvelling at how much he had improved, shedding a tear or two at how he had mastered a particular routine. Chris and Dianne are pictured above in white sparkly suits performing their "couples' choice".

Chris dedicated his win to Dianne, "and for everyone out there who has been told they couldn't do something or thought they couldn't do it". "It just shows with opportunity and support and determination, anything can happen," he said.

Before Chris, was Amar Latif, the first blind contestant to appear on Master Chef in 2020. Amar is the founder of Travel Eyes, who also lives with retinitis pigmentosa. He wowed the judges with his seabass dish and his tips for cooking perfect rice (followed to this day by our CEO!), rose to every challenge and was a definite Master Chef favourite.

Following the success of Amar and Chris on these primetime TV shows, it has been heartwarming to witness the surge in appreciation for what someone living with sight loss can achieve, given the opportunity.



# A Spring Poem

**A view from my window: written by Roy Pritchard.**

Since losing his sight in 2019, blind veteran Roy turned his talents to writing poetry to keep his brain active. Roy is a member of our choir and most recently performed this poem at our AGM.

I can't see the view from my window,  
I'm blind you see,  
But every spring I see daffodils bloom,  
Wherever I want them to be.  
Tulips and rosebuds, but not yet,  
It's much too soon.  
I hear birds singing in the trees,  
Accompanied by the hum of the bees,  
Later, I hear the sweet song of the blackbird,  
And the owl, twit twoo,  
Just for me and you.  
Tomorrow I'll smell the new mown hay,  
Perhaps the cuckoo song in early May.  
It's black in my world,  
But in my sight, I look to the sun,  
And the clear blue sky,  
All the rolling clouds, rolling on by.  
Am I happy? Well, let's just say,  
The view from my window,  
Is different every day.

# Celebrating our Volunteers

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

Twice a year, we celebrate with our volunteers and thank them for their continued support of our charity. Without our volunteers, we would not be able to continue running our services for local blind and partially sighted people.

The High Sheriff of Essex, David Hurst, was in attendance at our December Christmas party to add some gravitas to proceedings, and was himself given an award for 10 years of service as a volunteer with Southend in Sight!

In total, we awarded 12 certificates for long service to: Steve Bickell, John Rendell, Sandra Sheldrick and Paul Taylor for 5 years, Lorna Atherton, Virginia Beaumont, Jerry Davenport, David Hurst, James Newman and Viv Simmonds for 10 years, Margaret Randall for 15 years and Josie Window for 20 years.



CEO Lucy Martin said: “Our volunteers are simply the best. They go above and beyond to support us in all aspects of the work that we do, whether that be behind the scenes as a trustee, giving IT advice in our Centre, making tea at our coffee mornings, chatting on the

phone to isolated local residents or serving customers in our charity shop”.

The photo shows left to right: Stephanie Cooper (Vice Chair), The High Sheriff of Essex, Russell Cable (Chair of Trustees) and volunteers Sandra, Margaret, Jerry, Josie and Virginia, receiving their awards. If you would like to volunteer for us, please call our office and ask for an application form.

# Update from Guide Dogs

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

We have an update from our friends at Guide Dogs:



Do you have lived experience of sight loss and are you enthusiastic about campaigning and lobbying for positive change? If this is you, we'd love you to consider becoming one of Guide Dogs new Campaign Advisory Board Volunteers.

In this role you will be helping to ensure we are responding to the views and experiences of individuals with sight loss within our campaigning activities, enabling us to focus on the issues that matter the most.

The photo left shows Penny in a red coat with her guide dog Questa knocking on the door at No:10 Downing Street with a Guide Dogs campaign box.

You don't need to be a Guide Dogs service user or have an in-depth knowledge of campaigning, anyone in England with lived experience of sight loss is welcome to apply.

To learn more about the role or apply, contact Penny and Charlotte, Guide Dogs Lived Experience officers by email:

[livedexperience@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:livedexperience@guidedogs.org.uk).

Guide Dogs also offer some good sight loss awareness tips for family and friends supporting someone with sight loss. Check out their online training at [www.guidedogs.org.uk](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk) and search for "Sighted Guide Training".

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

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### **Our Charity values:**

- Excellence
- Community
- Empowerment
- Support
- Integrity

**Your vision is our vision**

