

Welcome to our Summer edition of In Touch. It's hard to believe that we have been in our new Centre at SAVS for a year now. We opened our doors on the 1st of May last year and in that time, we have greeted many new faces and met some old friends.



Our Wednesday volunteer trio are three familiar faces, pictured from left to right, Maria (yellow jumper), Jackie (red jumper) and Claire (black and white striped jumper) with Pascoe the Guide Dog sitting at Maria's feet. These ladies run our Wednesday drop-in session, which has proved to be one of our most popular days of the week – we wonder why!

In fact, over the last year we have welcomed 169 individuals through our doors multiple times just to our drop-in sessions, with hundreds more joining us at our activities or calling or visiting for sight loss advice. We think you will agree that our relocation to central Southend was a good move.

This issue is all about being independent, getting out and about and enjoying life to the full. It celebrates the diversity of activities the people we support are keen to take on – running, golf, ten pin bowling, cake making, singing – you name it, we have tried it. And if there is something you have always wanted to try, let us know and, within reason, we will do our best to accommodate you. We may draw the line at bungee jumping though...

Team Talk

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

The whole team has been busier this year, with an increase in people dropping into our Centre, as well as more people attending our activities. This is great news for us as we know we are in demand, but it may mean that you need to wait a little longer for a call back following an enquiry.

As well as offering specialist sight loss advice on equipment, lighting and magnification to over 500 people every year, we support the blind and partially sighted community with bespoke IT and form filling sessions. Our volunteers Paul, Steve, David and Barbara are always happy to help but do please call us to book an appointment.



Our drop-in sessions remain popular, especially our food themed ones! At one of our open mornings in March, we held an Easter cake making class, creating mini egg “Rocky Road” bars and some traditional chocolate nest cakes - they were absolutely delicious and not for sharing!

The photo left shows Linda sat at a table intent on decorating her chocolate nests with mini eggs, crushed Maltesers and marshmallows. One of the yellow fliers with this newsletter contains details of our drop-in sessions between July and September.

Dean continues to look after our Cadent Centres for Warmth project, as well as making his regular, essential wellbeing calls. As part of his work, he will be helping people to check they are receiving all the benefits they are entitled to and carrying out an “income maximisation” review. If you would like Dean to calculate your benefits, please do call our office on **01702 34 21 31**.

Our social activities are all well attended, with a new record being set at one of our recent coffee mornings – 40 people in total, all enjoying a hot drink and some chat! Our choir and talking book clubs continue, with details about these and our Fun Fridays on one of the enclosed yellow fliers.



The working age group has met for pizza again and our children have enjoyed soft play at Kids Kingdom and another animal encounter session. With snakes to touch and hold, as shown in the photo left, this was not for the faint hearted! A pottery session has also been planned during the school holidays. We are sure this will be great fun, although a little messy, we imagine.

We are receiving many calls about the hospital and the best way to reach the Eye Clinic. We have been informed that all calls for the hospital go through a central call centre where they are logged. We are aware that there is a long wait to speak to someone, but you are advised to hang on the line until you get through. The number for Southend Hospital is: **0300 443 0105**.

Our Eye Clinic Liaison Officer Tracey continues her work in a busy role at Southend Hospital, meeting patients and visiting people on the wards, as well as training staff in sight loss awareness. Over the last year she has supported over 1,200 patients at the Eye Clinic and helped to complete almost 400 Certificates of Visual Impairment, ensuring those who are newly registered receive the best care and support after their diagnosis.

Introducing...Lucy B

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

Lucy B (Bergsman) has been with us for a year now in her role as Central Administrator and doesn't really need an introduction, as many of you will have met Lucy in our Centre, or talked to her on the phone. We thought you might be interested to hear what Lucy's job entails...



"It's a varied role", says Lucy, pictured left. "No two days are the same, which I like. You never quite know how your day will pan out! My main task is to be the first port of call for anyone telephoning Southend in Sight or visiting us in the Centre. It can be very daunting to take that first step in dealing with your sight loss and my job is to make people feel comfortable".

"The phone calls can be about anything – equipment, Eye Clinic appointments, sometimes people who are newly diagnosed want to chat and are very emotional. I make sure that I update our records on our database every time I speak to someone."

"I also look after our stock of equipment at the Centre and order items such as glare glasses, magnifiers, bump-ons and lanyards. I have been shadowing our Sight Loss Advice Manager Coralie, learning about the equipment, and have recently started to run my own appointments too".

"Another part of my role is booking IT appointments and managing lists for our events such as our exhibition and demo days. I recently got involved in our Breast Screening Awareness event at the Centre, which I really enjoyed".

“Many mornings I oversee the drop-in sessions at our Centre. We introduced these when the charity moved to central Southend, and they have become very popular. Although it may seem simple – tea and chat – I can tell that we are making a difference to someone who may be feeling isolated. I trained to a Level 3 in counselling and find this part of my job particularly rewarding, especially when you see how much better someone is feeling after a conversation”.

“One of my stand out memories from the last year was chatting to someone who was writing a memoir about the steam railway and had worked on the C2C line. It turns out they worked with my great grandfather as he was retiring and they were starting out – it’s a small world!”

“For me, this job has given me the confidence to not be embarrassed about my own sight loss. I am surrounded by people who are dealing with it every day and I feel proud to be part of the sight loss community. I have not really been around visually impaired people since my school days, but this role has encouraged me to embrace it”.



“Although my role is busy, I know that I am supported by my colleagues, (pictured left Lucy, Coralie, Georgie, Lucy B and Liz). We really are a team, stepping in to help when needed. I am proud to be part of Southend in Sight

and proud of the work that we do”.

We think you will all agree that Lucy is an incredible asset to our team, with her cheery disposition and calm, collected manner. She is a busy mum of three but still has time for everyone and is passionate about supporting local blind and partially sighted people. Lucy – you have earned your stripes and deserve to be congratulated for all you have achieved over the last year.

Sporting News

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager

We were proud to support a new Sight Loss Golf Clinic at Garon Park in Southend in March, helping blind and visually impaired people discover or return to the game of golf.



The Norman Garon Trust delivered the session with their coaches, using innovative Toptracer technology to help players track their shots and receive feedback, even if they cannot see the ball in flight. The photo left shows Tim (right) and his coach pointing out how far his ball had flown and in what direction. The cameras around the driving range trace the balls in flight and feed the information back to the screens in each booth.

15 local visually impaired people attended, most of whom had never picked up a golf club before, with one player saying it was on his “bucket list”. The activity was even featured on BBC Look East!



The photo left shows Liam in an orange hoodie being coached on how to stand and swing his club. Liam was interviewed by the BBC and talked about how playing golf on his “Wi” at home had helped him understand the game.

The session’s aim was to create a welcoming pathway into golf for beginners and for those who may have stopped playing due to sight loss — building confidence, independence, and enjoyment through the game.

Andy Guildford, from England and Wales Blind Golf, who took part in the session, commented that a pathway was being created for local players to not only enjoy golf, but to build friendships, confidence and even work towards a handicap and future competitions!

Southend in Sight's Georgie Haynes said: "We are so pleased to be partnering with the Norman Garon Trust to enable local blind and partially sighted people to participate in this new activity. Not only is it an opportunity for people to experience the game of golf, but it encourages them to form friendships and make connections with each other".



And in other sporting news, some of the bowlers who meet every week to play at CJs have entered into the British Blind Sport Bowling Trios competition. This is the first time that 3 teams have competed and we are pleased to say that all 3 have qualified for the finals in Sheffield this year. The photo left shows some of the bowlers practising at CJs: Keith, Nicky, Jackie, Liam, Anne and Linda.

Liam and Nicky are a satellite team (called Norf and Souf) with 2 other players from "up north". Clare, Russell, Gary and Ray (with Christopher the Guide Dog) are the Southend VIPers, with Keith, Anne, Linda and Jackie playing as the Kinch Pins.

Anne Morris, the bowling activity lead says: "It's amazing that 3 teams from the top 16 are from Southend! There is such support and camaraderie between all our players, as well as some gentle teasing. I'm sure everyone will bowl their best and make Southend proud!"

For more information on future Sight Loss Golf Clinics or regular tenpin bowling, please contact Southend in Sight on **01702 34 21 31**.

Breast Screening Event

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

Essex Sight Loss Council hosted a dedicated Breast Screening Awareness event for blind and partially sighted women at our centre in March, thanks to a micro grant awarded by Healthwatch Essex in partnership with NHS Mid and South Essex.

The event brought together blind and partially sighted women aged 48 to 70 for an open discussion about the barriers they face when accessing breast screening. These included issues with communication formats, staff awareness, and the emotional and practical challenges of attending appointments.

Participants also heard from Angela Fiore, a nurse at Lady McAdden, a local breast cancer charity dedicated to supporting people before, during, and after breast cancer. She explained the importance of screening, what happens during an appointment, and how to carry out self-checks.

Lucy Martin, CEO, Southend in Sight, said: “We were very happy to host this event to help improve accessibility for breast screening appointments for blind and partially sighted people, and fully support the mission to increase access to healthcare.”



The photo left shows a group of blind and partially sighted attendees stood alongside Amy Askew, Engagement Manager for Thomas Pocklington Trust, Angela and Lauren from Lady McAdden, and Lucy B from Southend in Sight. They are stood facing the camera, smiling.

NHS Passport

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

Staff recently discovered the “health and care passport”, a document that is designed to give health and social care professionals more information about you to help them provide the right care and treatment. It should help them understand what reasonable adjustments they should make for you and how to communicate effectively so your voice is heard.

You can show your NHS passport to anyone in health and care such as a GP receptionist, a doctor, a nurse, your dentist or ambulance crew and it can be used for planned appointments or in an emergency.

You can complete the health and care passport on your own or with support. A copy can be printed off by you or someone else, or you can complete the template online (via the NHS website – search for health and care passport).

The NHS passport has different sections relating to specific areas of need. There are basic details, such as your preferred name, your date of birth and NHS number, along with any important medical needs (e.g diabetic) and any people who are important to you (along with their contact details and relationship to you).

For anyone living with a visual impairment, additional support and communication needs are the most important section. You can let people know how you wish to receive information – for example you may prefer to be called about an appointment or update, or to receive details in a large print letter, but not in an email. You can describe your level of sight and how someone can best support you, including where to be seated to make the most of your sight (or hearing). You can indicate that you need guiding into and out of a room or need to be supported in taking medication as you cannot read the labels, or would like braille labels to enable you to do this independently. And for hospital stays, simple changes, such as staff introducing themselves and letting you know that your food or cup of tea has arrived and where it has been placed, could make all the difference.

For more information on the health and care passport, please visit the NHS website or talk to your health practitioner about filling out a form.

Travel and Leisure

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

Southend Bus Passes.

Some great news for anyone with a disabled bus pass. You can now use your pass from 6am every weekday morning on any bus journey starting in the Southend area. Previously, you were required to wait until 9am.

This means that anyone living with sight loss who travels to work by bus can now get around for free, and anyone with early morning appointments can also get where they need to be using public transport. An orange stripe on the right-hand side of your pass indicates a disability to the bus driver.

If you would like support in filling out a bus pass form, please contact our office for an appointment on **01702 34 21 31**.

Access Card.

For anyone that likes going to the theatre, attending concerts or any major attractions, an Access card (or Nimbus pass) is a must.



It costs just £15 for 3 years and can be used at any venue as recognised proof of your disability or impairment. Symbols are used on the photo ID card – braille for a visual impairment, or a “+1” if you need a guide, among others. It means that you will not repeatedly need to explain any additional needs you may have when you book your next outing and helps to build a

more inclusive environment, encouraging venues and service providers to be more proactive in their accessibility efforts. The photo above left shows an example of a photo ID Access Card with symbols.

To apply, you will need to fill out a form online and submit official documentation. For more information on this, or help with filling out the form, please call our office on: **01702 34 21 31**.

Guided Running

Written by Catherine Hodgson, Fundraising & Comms. Manager.

Earlier this year we were approached by Leigh on Sea Striders - a local running club - with an offer to coach someone visually impaired who wanted to either start or return to running, as part of their Couch to 5K Programme. We were overwhelmed by the number of people wanting to take up the challenge, so resorted to pulling a name out of a hat. The lucky winner was Markus Birdman.

Steve, a newly trained guide runner and his colleague Zoe have been supporting Markus over an 8 week period. Steve said: “Markus has been a joy to run with and as expected, this has been a great learning opportunity for Zoe and I – we have gained confidence and now want to offer further opportunities to other visually impaired people who are keen to take up running”.



Markus had run before he experienced his sight loss but needed support to get back into an activity he enjoyed.

Markus said: “Zoe and Steve have been my trusty guides and have been so positive and generous with their time and efforts. Thank you so much to them and to the Leigh Striders, who have been so welcoming and fun to run with”.

The photo left shows Zoe (left), Markus (centre) and Steve (right) in their hi-vis running jackets at

Chalkwell beach on a sunny day. If you are interested in running, please contact our office to be put on the waiting list.

Southend in Sight – your local sight loss charity.

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Our Charity values:

- Excellence
- Community
- Empowerment
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Your vision is our vision

